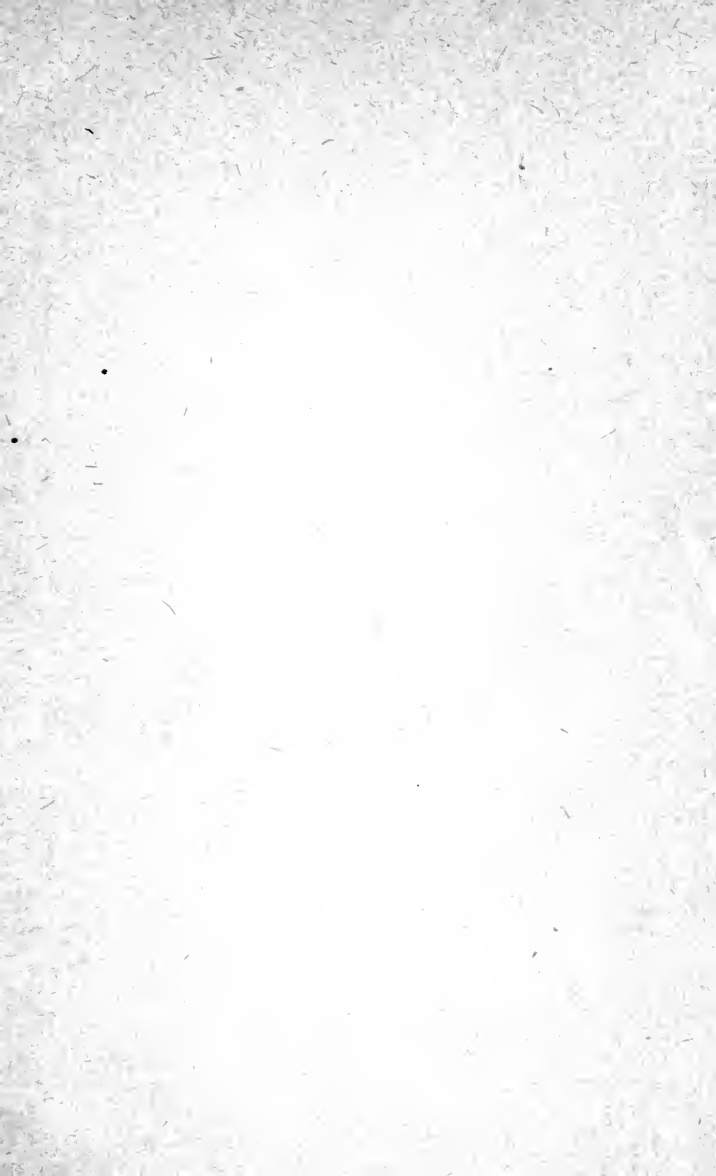


LETTERS FROM COLORADO

BY H. L. WASON







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LETTERS

FROM

COLORADO

BY

H. L. WASON

BOSTON

CUPPLES AND HURD

94 Boylston Street

1887

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INTRODUCTORY.

Argument.

On parting, two Graduates agree to keep warm their College friendship. The story tells how the one who became a traveler kept his promise, also how the one who remained behind broke faith, in offering to the public, letters supposed to be written for his eyes alone.

MEMORY draws aside the curtain
That so long has hid the past,
Brings a troupe of spectral figures
To the footlights thronging fast —
College scenes, with College comrades
In fantastic groupings cast.

Seen as now, e'er life had tried them,
They appear a motley set;
Innocent of all ambition,
Plan nor purpose outlined yet;
Caring naught beyond the compass
Of what joy the days beget.

Till, as ever among numbers
Thought is centered on a few,
Dwindles down that host of actors
Till it circles only two ;
I myself, and but one other
Filling all the nearer view.

Boots it little what our titles
In life's throngs of busy men —
I, beloved of Van as brother,
Hal, and only Hal, was then ;
Van and Hal we shall be ever
Should our lives converge again.

Van was rich, attractive, graceful
I was poor and plain and shy ;
Staunchest friends we were at College,
Left our Alma with a sigh,
He, to travel and enjoyment,
To a round of labor I.

He, the elder by three summers,
Younger seemed to careless gaze,
That an airy independence,
Glossing over earnest ways,
From the outpost admiration
Stormed the citadel of praise.

Touch of art can little heighten
Real worth of solid gold ;
Yet she beautifies the metal
By a chaste and graceful mould,
And this base that art had fashioned,
Bore the crown stamp, plain and bold.

Clear my last impression of him
As a ray of prisoned light ;
Standing, full equipped for travel
Eyes with expectation bright ;
Which I knew would dim with sorrow
Once unfettered from my sight.

He was bound for Colorado —
“Talk no more of classic Greece
Of her Gods and buried heroes —
Let them sleep the sleep of peace ;
But for us who shape the future
It is time their power should cease.

“I must scale the Rocky Mountains—
Long known haunts have all grown old,
And this fair new State is crowded
With crude marvels never told
Outside of rugged silver seams
And streams of unwashed gold.

“ Such pæans of enjoyment
My wakened muse shall sing,
From my astonished country
A prophet’s praises wring,
Till even my own hamlet
Shall grudging tributes bring.

“ But chiefest, more than brother,
Mine eyes to thee will turn;
For thy quick words of guidance
In grieving silence yearn,
But keep their loving import green
In Memory’s golden urn —

“ To thee before all others
I look for blame or praise ;
Be never less a Mentor
Than in our college days,
And help my unskilled fingers
To grasp the poet’s bays. ”

The Summer into gorgeous beauty rounded,
Bringing such joyous strains
From the delighted traveler as he bounded
O’er snow-clad hills and plains —

Strains jubilant, glad notes of keenest pleasure,
In vales and tender skies;
Our frigid English tongue could hardly measure
His bursting rhapsodies.

Letter from him, so sweet delight to me,
Should selfishness reserve with grasping key,
Nor broad unfold, that many eyes may trace
In every line some friend's familiar face?
Less guarded they may be in grace of tone,
As being written for my eyes alone ;
But uncut diamonds oftimes pleasure give.
Methinks I, showing these, should thanks receive ;
Pay them to him in praises kindly spoken
That no regrets remain thro' my faith broken.
For Mentor like a coward shrank a duty
Love only could perform,
It seemed rude sacrilege to change a beauty
Or hide a faulty form.







LETTER I.

ACROSS THE SAN LUIS VALLEY.

LETTERS are thoughts, by friendship loosely tied,
As flowers in nosegay form for friendship's pleasure,
Where varied hue, with fragrance sweet allied,
Make gift so small, a joy beyond all measure.

'Tis not the flowers alone nor grateful scent.

All may have flowers, all breathe their rich perfume.
Nor weighs the contour. Some are quickly sent,
With careless twine about a simple bloom,

Yet valued none the less. It is the hand

That culls the nosegay with a thoughtful care,
And weaves a thread of heart-love in the band

With the receiving hand its love to share,
Which gives it worth ; and letters are like flowers,
Binding with unseen cord some heart to ours.

Truth unadorned is a beauteous maid,
But fairer in fitting robes arrayed ;
I have not fashioned a garment yet,
Which to her matchless form can set,
Attracting all by its wondrous grace,
Till they end by feasting upon her face.

Yet hearts, in earnest, achieve at last,
Do they grasp their floating anchor fast.
A poet's hope is a deathless thing,
Will sometimes droop with a weary wing,
But trifles, lighter than heated air,
Will brush from the plumes the dust of care,
And lo! with free pinions wide unfurled,
'Tis bidding defiance to all the world.

No hopes ambitious are hidden here,
No freedom hampered by cringing fear.
These letters are written alone for you,
In heart too noble, of soul too true
To seek for faults while a grace you find.
To mercy by loving faith inclined,
Accept the motive which prompts the act,
And merge delight in the simple fact.

I pass the miseries met by rail,
To moderns all, an oft told tale,
And start my notes upon the stage,
A fossil of the vanished age,
A Concord Coach the classic name
By which it shall descend to fame :
'Tis eight feet long by four feet wide,
With huge expansive power inside,
Embracing in its padded folds
The total sum of thirteen souls !
Two average in the aggregate,
A trifle off, six hundred weight.

Before the town is well astir
We shake its dust off with a whir,
When our six horses rush us out,
First four, then two complete the route,
Only the "clear thro'" sufferers know,
This noisy splendor is all show.

We drop our live freight one by one,
Till four usurp the Coach alone —
Two tender children; no complaint
From either, at the harsh restraint,
Tho' heat and dust and length'ning hours
Are sapping stronger vital powers.

I pay hot court to the little maid
Of scarce five summers, she, gravely staid,
Recounts the fun of her brother's freaks
With demurest dimples in her cheeks,
With eyes of mischief too full by half,
But the mouth breaks never into a laugh.

He, wee male lordling, exacts her care
With his sex's grand imperial air,
Alike unwilling to yield or fight,
She stratagem uses instead of might,
And brings an embryo woman's skill
To juggle her petty tyrant's will.

Poor weary baby, he finds no rest,
On that couch consoling, his mother's breast,

Unknowing what troubles, he pines and frets,
The sweet child-woman cajoles and pets
Till working some secret treasure loose
She brings out of hiding a "Mother Goose."

She turns each page with seductive art,
Well knowing the stories all by heart,
Cons over the tales with a cunning smile,
Enjoying her harmless cheat the while,—
And soon the demure, sweet, dimples creep,
For the vanquished monarch is fast asleep.
The victor herself is safe at rest
Five minutes later upon my breast.
'Tis life in miniature: Man's free (?) course
Shaped ever by woman's mightier force;
She, proud of his strength and lordly ways,
Learns but his will and at once obeys,
Misdoubts his vaunt as creation's lord
But wisely answers him not a word.
He feels her fetters, he chafes and frets,
She weaves them tighter, cajoles and pets,
She has conned the stories of "Mother Goose,"
The struggle ends in a sudden truce,
To her cheeks the triumphant dimples creep,
And the vanquished monarch is fast asleep.

In solitary state we onward wind
Across a trackless waste of bush and sand;
My little mistress being left behind,
All else is dreary as the stretching land.

A pale blue streak denotes the horizon's verge,
One dead, flat plain smooths out on every side,
Oh ! for the white curl of the restless surge,—
Some hue and motion to this desert wide.

'Tis like the ocean in its shapeless stretch,
Our coach the ship becalmed upon its breast,
For tho' we move, to the imprisoned wretch,
The snail-like pace is other name for rest.

We reach Del Norté after night is set,
And have six prancing steeds to whirl us in.
Here I deposit every last regret
For a new life does joyously begin.





LETTER II.

ABOVE DEL NORTE.

FROM Lookout Mountain, opens on my eyes
A gleam of beauty lost from Paradise.
The day is perfect ; never sun like this
Touches New York with e'en a passing kiss ;
Luxurious, warm, his tender golden rays
Melt in the distance to a mellow haze,
And edge around the valley, till the sight
Tangibly quivers with entranced delight.

Some sixty miles to Eastward, lies a range
From the main range a spur, which, coldly strange,
Glides like a ghostly thing adown the vale,
Nor grey of color, blue, nor ashy pale ;
Yet that same hue a living blood-red glows —
When sunset on the awful pallor grows,
“Sangre de Cristo ” (Spanish cavaliers
Were not renowned for too refined ears),
In our tongue Blood of Christ. The chiseled crests,
Like Aztec priests in stoles and snowy vests,
O'erlook the land of Montezuma's fame,
Nor wake one mournful echo to his name.

Words seem but feeble to depict aright
The solemn grandeur of that dull, dead white,
Convey the sense of wandering magnitude,
Impressed by the majestic solitude.
Those peaks pyramidal, distinctly shaped,
Each solitary, sculptured point, close-draped
By the blue tapestry of bluest skies,
Which deepens near them into purple dyes,
While towers above, the sky and range between,
Sierra Blanca, Colorado's queen,
Too proudly royal to admit of mate
Sharing the honors of her regal state.

We, having learned some minor things, do know
That range is covered with perpetual snow ;
But 'tis as if we knew a foreign tongue
Through its love-ditties beautifully sung.
Then see the land in martial pomp arrayed,
Strong in a strength no legions e'er dismayed,
Thrill at the power in the same words revealed
When as a ringing war-chant they are pealed.

The Rio Grande del Norte's silver grey
Betrays his serpentine and devious way
By jewels flashing in the bright June sun,
Showing triumphantly his labor done
On fertile plains, and fields of living green,
Where late a barren wilderness has been.

How like a spirit in the vale he glides ! —
Now in broad view, now in a covert hides,

Now arched by willows, now an aspen copse
Dots with bright foliage, banks and arid slopes ;
While here and there, a lonely pinion stands
Guarding the valley with its waving hands.

The pretty town Del Norte at my feet,
Its busy people thronging in the street,
Is girded by a sparkling crystal band
Of limpid water from the Rio Grande ;
Like many a town in this erratic West,
At any hour't may to the front be pressed,
And have prosperity inflate its pride
By a Bonanza from the near outside.

No mining town ? May be ; one never knows.
Summitville flourishes among the snows
That grace the Western ranges, beetling brows,
And is, they say, a solid bed of gold,
Within a flimsy sheet of earth enrolled
To save the precious ore from taking cold.

They call me Tenderfoot, and spin me yarns
A crooning nurse would blush to tell her bairns.
The air is light ; th' inflated nothings float,
Collapse and sink, like a child's paper boat,
Nor orator nor audience deceive.

I came to see and hear ; — but to believe
All that I hear ? No faith can bear the strain ;
She plumes her willing pinions all in vain,
Faints in the effort but to realize
Truth hides a kernel in their pulpy size.

The Colorado miner is a genius, no mistake—
Mixture of vice and virtue, uncertain as his stake;
Swears by his Lilliputian town (but just to humbug you)
With a grotesque self-consciousness, most ravishing to
view,
Tells you his town can run the State, his State the
President,
But by the sly leer in his eye, you guess how much is
meant.

You're welcome at his fireside ; his cabin's homely fare
Is spread with open-handed grace, and you are pressed
to share.

A half contemptuous pity spices all his courteous speech,
"Pity that no Bonanza lies just within (?) your reach."
Your present wants are furnished, but his; oh! faith
sublime,
Are drawing compound interest, from compensating
time.

With pon'drous ranges looming, broad valleys at his
feet,

His vision only bounded where sky and prairie meet,
Is it strange he fails to notice the arid barren earth,
When even the streams that feed him, spring on the
hills to birth?

Or that he learns to look on life thro' lens of mighty
scope,

When his blue horizon arches all the broad Pacific
slope?



LETTER III.

“ON TO SAN JUAN.”

HAVING that well-worn motto full in view,
“One going to Rome should do as Romans do,”
I’ve laid my plans for starting “Westward ho!”
In gypsy fashion, as the natives go;
After much anxious thought I’ve bought a horse,
Renowned for idleness, not speed and force,
And warranted of gentle disposition,
With no desire to start an exhibition
After original and crude ideas
Of laws of gravity and human fears.

“He’s not a genuine bronco — quarter breed,”
The owner says, who recommends the steed,
And I, with queer experiences yet new,
Intensely hope that but one fourth as few
Of antics as the “genuine” he can do.

A bucking bronco is a thing of dread,
Takes independent notions in his head,
Refusing to be coaxed, coerced or led.

Smile not, oh, friend ! I learned to ride by rule,
Bore off all honors at the training school ;
But my conceit is meeker now, and cool.

The youngest cow-boy scouring o'er the plains
Has firmer seat, more skilful grip of reins.
Equestrians, like myself, are apt to find
Their studied horsemanship too well refined
To be successful with the bronco kind.
He owns no curb drawn by a gentle hand,
And *that* he makes his rider understand.

It looks so easy, any child could sit
Who knows but how to manage rein and bit ;
It looks so easy, every horseman tries
And never fails to meet with a surprise.
One used to riding very seldom halts,
And, without thinking, in the saddle vaults
From force of habit touches with the spur,
Which trifling act is apt to make a stir.

Then, too, the bronco never deigns to start
Like well trained horses in the city mart,
But makes an aimless lunge, describes a curve
That shoots electric thrills thro' every nerve,
Leaps wildly in the air, bound after bound,
Ten feet, often fifteen, above the ground,
Descending, with his tail spread on the breeze,
An angle forms of forty-five degrees,
Places his head between his stiff fore-legs,
Which, when he lights, are rigid as iron pegs,

Plants all his feet together, lifts his back,
And you beyond it with a spiteful thwack;
Suddenly changing from his line of base,
Leaves you suspended, wildly clutching space
'Till gravitation kindly aids your case.

The power of matter over mind here shown
Is not disputed, after one is thrown;
In such catastrophes a sufferer knows
How little sympathy his audience shows,
Yet feels no malice. Even resentment shrinks
Appalled before what a spectator thinks;
His starch is gone, shouts and derisive jeers
Surge thro' the portals of distended ears,
And he is sure to find the mocking laughter
To leave a most persistent flavor after.

Better perhaps if I had bought a "jack,"
Walking beside him while he bears my pack —
A roll of blankets, coffee-pot, tin cup,
Flour sack, with like substantials covered up,
Such as yeast-powder, bacon and dried fruit,
With other little luxuries that suit.

I should enjoy it of all other things
But for the merriment my greenness brings;
I dread the covert shafts of ridicule
Worse than a boy at his first term of school.
The name of "Tenderfoot" is not exempt
From malice, in its pitying contempt.

Fancy me, solus, by a camp-fire, cooking.
Your fancy could not paint me without looking
I've donned the garb that every miner wears :
A suit of duck, proof against soils (?) and tears ;
A hat resembling, somewhat, an umbrella,
Which gives a traveled look to any fellow ;
Strong calf-skin boots,— the miner is as neat
As any city dandy in the feet,
Proud of his boot, displays it every bit,
His ducking overalls stuck into it,
And if he owns that gem, a shapely calf,
Is vainer than a Broadway swell by half.

This whole life simulates a happy dream,
Outside the age of telegraph and steam —
No cars, few stages, everything one sees
Tending to lassitude and careless ease ;
No rush of time, to-day as is to-morrow
Sufficient for its role of joy or sorrow ;
After the busy swirl of New York strife
Most like a page from an enchanted life.

Tender blue sky draping the snowy ranges,
Fleecy white clouds, constant in ceaseless changes,
Always the hush of unbroke solitude,
That dearest charm to the poetic mood,
As if the land were peopled still by races
That walk in shadow thro' beloved places.

Passing me now a brace of prairie-schooners
With drivers who would make expert harpooners,

Six span of mules their whip-lash reaches over,
Nor ever misses mark or touches cover;
These prairie-schooners are — well let me see,
A man-o'-war on land instead of sea,
And carry — I'm afraid to say how much,
The lightness of the atmosphere is such,
You'll think me "dizzy" with its airy touch.

They take provisions over to the miners —
Returning, bring crude ore to the refiners,
Travel in pairs, because the rugged roads
Play "Hobb" too often with the heavy loads ;
The second team unhitched, passes the first,
Aids it in doubtful places or the worst,
Thus they join teams, as they express it, "double,"
Simple preventive to a world of trouble.





LETTER IV.

A BURRO TRAIN.

I've wondered oft, how Atlas bore the earth,
But wonder now is wholly lost in mirth,
For here, before my very eyes I see
Apt illustration of the imagery;
It was a burro, not a god, I guess
Reduced to such unspeakable distress —
Among a motley swarm all pack and ears
A walking show-case visibly appears.

I stand aside to let the marvel pass,
'Tis eight feet long, brass hinges, French plate-glass,
Seeming possessed of voluntary motion,
Starting a pilgrimage on private notion;
The motive power invisible is quite,
Even the flapping ears hidden from sight,
I only catch a pair of earnest eyes
Expressing just a shadow of surprise
At my amusement at his uncouth burden —
Poor beast! curses too oft his only guerdon!

Ah! we New Yorkers are behind the times,
Spite of our love of dollars made from dimes.

What business man would undertake to pack
An eight-foot show-case on a burro's back,
Without a cover, open to the sun,
And hope to land it safe in Silverton,
From Del Norte a hundred miles at least,
Sure-footed howsoe'er his little beast,
And over roads whose ruggedness is even
Worse than the highway to the poet's heaven?

Others are packed with mining-tools and grub,
From corn and flour to baked beans from the "Hub,"
Hardware, nail-kegs, tin pans, in dire confusion
Stoves, axes, handles, ropes, a wild profusion,
Picks, shovels, bales of dry goods, everything
That man can want, or beast of burden bring;
Canned fruit in boxes, one on either side,
The 'cute diminutive completely hide;
Yet on he trots with enviable *sang froid*,
As unconcerned as any truant boy.

Necessity, the mother of invention,
Developes art worthy of highest mention.

Where bars of iron and steel too long to pack
Are fastened so they *trail behind the jack*;
One end is to the saddle firmly tied,
Always one bar or more on either side.

And, where of extra length, too long to trail,
Think not that ingenuity will fail ;
 Bars for all purposes, for smelters, mills,
 Perform the part of elongated thills,
Between which are two burros hitched in tandem,
With skilful care, not jostled in at random.

Like you the picture? Words but ill portray
'The laugh-provoking, comical display,
And fail entirely on the doleful bray;
 I can't describe it ; I can only laugh,
 He looks so like a longing, half-weaned calf ;
Mouth wide, head forward, stiffened tail outstretched,
As that queer sound from its extreme were fetched.
 From sympathy with that pathetic wail,
 Some wag has christened him the nightingale.
Centering in force what it in beauty lacks,
It has no rival but — another jack's.





LETTER V.

ALONG THE RIO GRANDE.

I NEVER knew how beautiful, how bright,
How full of exquisite and keen delight
Life could become with Silence for a friend —
None to exchange ideas, to comprehend
The cause of rhapsodies so lightly penned.

I, full reclining on the river's banks,
Accept my destiny with speechless thanks ;
'Tis good to stretch me in the sun of June ;
The Rio Grande is in perfect tune,
And the great pine-boughs swaying overhead,
A subtle perfume like ambrosia shed ;
The blue sky floats some specks of fleecy white,
Enough to make its brilliant hue more bright,
Gorgeous wild flowers indent the slopes of green
Where the grey, restless river rolls between,
And peace — a tangible, delightful elf —
Has all this lovely covert to herself.

Is the spot haunted?
Never such sweetness
Rounded a human voice
Into completeness;
Liquid and saintly
Floats to my ear,
Ave Maria,
Ave Maria.

Sweet Mary Mother,
Night shades are falling,
Silence and darkness
Closely enwalling;
Thou being guardian
What should we fear?
Ave Maria,
Ave Maria.

Ave Maria, trembling, vibrating, swelling,
The singer's voice upon those words keeps dwelling —
Now like a plea for mercy, now the prayer
Of some soul in the anguish of despair,
Lulling again, before the prayer can cease,
Into the ecstasy of perfect peace.

The spell is broken, a clear tenor voice
Breaks into carol, a sweet Spanish ditty,
In which a swain, to lady of his choice,
Urges a thousand pleas to wake her pity.

Next comes a drinking-song, just as my eyes
Fall on the singer, not with less surprise
Than had Don Cortez stood in modern guise.
Shall I describe him? Words can never paint
The lines that mark a sinner from a saint,
In our day they have become so faint;
And daily intercourse perfects disguises,
Which, in its soul, the false old world despises.

He represents a man in golden prime,
Before one sees the finger-marks of Time,
He wears a miner's garb, a huge sombrero,
Is, as the Spaniards say, a caballero,
And rides a "genuine" bronco, curbed and bitted,
(Some like the rabbits, in old times were spitted,)
A brace of pistols decorates his belt,
Doubtless the *coup-de-grace* they oft have dealt,
A bowie-knife — I almost look for scalps,
Or brigands climbing up the rugged Alps.

He slackens rein, and, with unstudied grace,
Presents a passport in his handsome face;
Couched in his lips a daring manhood lies,
A woman's softness in the deep brown eyes;
A thick brown beard, a figure like Apollo,
An air that can command but never follow;
And crowning all the nameless, graceful ease,
That marks the consciousness of power to please.

Visions of thieves had flitted thro' my mind,
But fear I could not, howsoe'er inclined —

One who displayed the polish of a court ;
(Perhaps the brace of pistols were for sport.)

Without presenting "letters," I was bid
To join the little cavalcade now hid
By the "big bend." "The train" had been delayed,
But would be coming soon "across the grade ;"
So, with the jovial freedom of the State,
We traveled on together ; stopping late
Beneath a pine tree, camping for the night,
Our fire behind a boulder painting bright
Our swarthy faces in its ruddy light.

"The train," a score of jacks turning the bend,
A dim grotesqueness to the scenery lend.
I, on my mossy couch, behold anew
From an entirely different point of view,
Comical, earnest, — life to them is real,
They look responsible, whate'er they feel —
Come into camp with all a veteran's pride,
Sedately stand till the huge pack's untied,
And, as demurely in the dry dust roll,
Their simple toilet for a pleasant stroll.

On the green sward our frugal meal was spread,
Coffee and bacon, with impromptu bread ;
I, who have fed on dainties, for the call,
Out-ate the hungriest miner of them all ;
And I have reached one point of my desire,
Eating and sitting by a great camp fire,

Our dusky figures lighted by the blaze.
The pleasures of my Saratoga days
Have never yielded me such true delight —
The foot-hills bounding all our nearer sight,
The Rio Grande singing at our feet,
No other sound disturbing our retreat.

We smoked in silence for an hour at least,
Dessert divine to so divine a feast,
And then, I scarce know how, great yarns were spun,
“Sindbad the Sailor” badly was outdone ;
The theme was chiefly San Juan and its glory,
Each listening gravely to another’s story,
And striking deftly from a given point,
Knocking all former bragging out of joint.
One could not laugh, for it was honest, partly.
The lies were huge, but burnished up so smartly,
That Truth, like Charity, was made to cover,
With a small garment, many a blemish over.

“There is the North Star on King Solomon,”
In tones not to be questioned, quoted one,
“Why, in the moonlight you can see the vein,
A rill of silver, lighting all the plain
Down to Arastra Gulch, against the sky
Its splendor dazes even the accustomed eye ;
Not even the Comstock of Nevada fame,
So all-deserving of a world-wide name.”

Another said : “Better is the North Star
On Sultan Mountain, famous near and far
As mines that pay from starting always are,”

Said yet a third; "The Belcher, tho' not known,
With some development, will soon be shown
As best of all; for my part, I would *rather*
Own in the Belcher than seek any farther."

Each had a favorite which he, reckless, praised;
My curiosity was wildly raised
At every fresh recital most amazed,
All took their turn except my host, and he
Preferred to add his mite in melody.

SONG.

"Westward the march of empire takes its way"
 And that is no bravado,
As any one of us can truly say
 Who comes to Colorado,
"Westward the march of empire takes its way"
 Not only true but handy;
For we can pitch our tents at close of day
 Along the Rio Grande.

He lightly trolled a chorus to the song,
Flinging the tripping melody along
The rugged crags, the hills, the hanging rocks,
Till echo in a trill of rapture mocks,
Back comes the song a group of perfect notes;
Out on the listening air again it floats,
Then back to us once more, a little fainter,
Distance but making every sound the quainter.

Sleep pressed her gentle fingers on my eyes,
But failed to chase the gorgeous phantasies
Conjured up by the fireside sorceries,
And "North Stars" pirouetted thro' my brain
With "Pelicans" bearing their starry train
With "Belcher" lodes, coquettish "Highland Marys"
"Lookouts" and "Mountaineers" turned into fairies,
Waltzing with "Polar Bears" across the prairies;

With "Iowas" and "Little Giants" tripping
A minuet, and "Yellow Jackets" tipping
The golden goblets they were slyly sipping,
And every mine distinctly in my dreams,
Somehow displayed, developed silver seams
That fairly crazed me with their dazzling beams.

I don't believe that I *am* wholly sane;
Perhaps shall never be quite so again;
For veins of silver dance athwart my sight
Till I no longer see the world aright;
Without my seeking, fickle Fortune casts
My daily life among enthusiasts,
Whose faith, fast anchored where no doubt can reach,
Makes easy converts to the creed they preach.





LETTER VI.

A MORNING SCENE.

MORNING upon the Rockies,
I meant to see it rise ;
But such a panorama
Unfolded to my eyes,
I really quite forgot it
'Twixt laughter and surprise.

The "jacks" were rounded early
And busy on the steal ;
One chewing up the flour sack
With most praiseworthy zeal,
While one, in emulation,
Devoured our morning meal.

Another, as a dainty,
Munched at a straying hose :
His enterprising neighbor
Searched for the owner's toes,
Who, with a yell of anguish,
To perpendicular rose.

My host, that very moment,
From dreams enraptured woke,
And into such a volley
Of dubious blessings broke,
The air was charged with something
I hardly think was smoke.

It wakened the last sleeper,
Also a savage shout
Resounding as a Cossack's
When storming a redoubt,
And every half-robed sluggard
Assisted at the rout.

Those jacks dispersed like magic
At an impromptu pace,
When back returned our tenor,
No ruffle on his face,
Proffered his morning greeting
With suave bewitching grace.

Our cook was not so placid,
A growl continuous, deep,
Kept rumbling from the caverns
Where imprecations keep
Their intervals of silence
By growing to a heap.

Our appetites were whetted,
We swallowed with a zest,
Coffee, and beans and bacon,
Seasoned with many a jest,

For laughter in a camp-life
Is ever welcome guest.

Then came the trick of packing,
But, brother of my heart,
I need a Phiz's pencil
Joined to a Vinci's art,
And Steno's flying fingers
To do a rightful part.

I saw, but can't describe it,
The double diamond hitch
Where ropes are looped and knotted,
Deft as a weaver's stitch,
And formed to a quadrangle
By a peculiar twitch.

This holds the bulky burden
Securely into place,
Nor can the creature loose it,
However brisk his pace,
Not if he waxeth wrathy
And starteth on a race.

I'd ask a score of questions,
But think I'd better not—
A packer at his packing
Is like a simmering pot,
Which only needs a shaving
To render boiling hot.

I'll keep my soul in patience,
Nor risk abrupt digression —
You know our modern valor
Is first born of discretion,
And always plans advances
By seeming sweet concession.

The rapid, busy turmoil
Direst confusion seems,
Thro' which no gleam of order,
Even for a moment gleams;
'Tis much as if from chaos,
We strove to bring our dreams.

My host said, laughing gaily,
"Embodied innocence,
Are those tormenting burros,
Possess so little sense
That man's diviner nature
Is all their poor defense.

A target for our malice,
Our shafts of ridicule,
He yet has learned the logic
Of the world's selfish school;
To hide his inward meanness
"By manners of a fool."

While we conversed, moved on the cavalcade
In solitary file across the grade,

All prankings over, sober, earnest, brave,
Their every motion, as their faces, grave ;
We passed them, and a brisk, delightful trot
Brought us abruptly to a charming spot,
Where the great river winds thro' aspen copse,
Guarded on either side by towering slopes
Of mountain ridges : there the burnished pine
Glasses its beauty till the waters shine ;
A garnered grove of mossy brake and fen,
Reminding one of some fay-haunted glen ;
No living thing was there, but every tree
Spread out each leaf in seeming ecstasy,
And, over all, the tenor's voice arose
In an impassioned anthem to repose.

Nothing is lost, they say, but nevermore
Will that sweet song electrify my ears,
Unless, as a chaste memory, 'tis wafted o'er
The " Haunted Glens " I see in coming years.





LETTER VII.

THE TENOR'S STORY.

WE 'VE exchanged cards — my autograph you know ;
My host's, John Smith ! I hardly dare to show
I cannot call him *that*. Why, all romance
Will vanish from him at the barest glance.
He must be simply Tenor, ours, or mine,
And thus invested with a right divine
In a celestial atmosphere to shine.

His glorious voice is ever tuned for duty,
Quickly responsive to a touch of beauty,
Heedless who hears, careless if all unheard,
He trolls his songs like an unfettered bird ;
Seems, like the nightingale, compelled to sing,
If but the silent vales are listening.
'Tis one enraptured holiday to me ;
Who never weary of such melody.

I've hardly tested yet his gift of speech,
If he prefers to ridicule or preach ;
But as we ride along, a vagrant thought
Some merry memory to his mind has brought,
And you may judge, as almost word for word,
I give the story simply as I heard.

“ I wanted yet of age a month or so
When first I sauntered into Mexico —
My sole possession an unfaltering pluck
That often served me in the place of luck ;
For youth, reared under staunch New England rule,
Honors itself too much to play the fool ;
And I, starting to test the world alone,
Owned no defeat, uttered no whining moan,
Buckled my harness on with seeming zeal,
Resolved to ape a joy I did not feel.

“ Fate led me to a stately Spanish Don
With two young daughters, brilliant as the sun,
But full of Eve as are those impish creatures
Branded with all perfection in the features.
Nature must mete her favors with some grace,
Who gifts of wisdom have, show few of face.
No leopard in the brake was slimmer, neater,
Than she called commonly La Signorita,
And, like a leopard, she had talons hid
For such as failed to do her will when bid.

“ Donna Inez, the younger by a year,
Had tender eyes suspicious of a tear.
They were but just from Convent, where I ween
A bright perpetual torment they had been ;
For 'tis a freak of Nature, I believe,
That teaches every woman to deceive.
Why, they could mince, and laugh, and play coquette,
With any city belle I ever met.

“ My task was breaking broncos. At my side
The pretty signoritas learned to ride.
My loyalty was often sadly tried ;
For those dark gleaming eyes beneath the lashes
Would scintillate as Summer lightning flashes.
Their father trusted me beyond conception,
My youth, perhaps, precluding all deception ;
But, stranger, when I have a brace of girls,
I'll never trust them to the cranks and quirks
Of any man, or be he young or old,
And you'll uphold me when my story's told.

“ Donna Inez, I said, was shy and tender,
Needing a fearless gallant to defend her ;
Yet she contrived to cheat her trusting sire
With a dexterity you will admire.
I was not cheated quite, a latent taint
Of native doubt warding off the complaint.
It takes a Puritan a whole life long
Before his confidence grows hale and strong
In any given person, place or thing ;
And then he holds a mental reservation
To save his conscience from a deadly sting,
And salve his wounded pride and approbation.

“ Don Olen de Pizarro, over late,
Halted one night before the plaza gate.
Ever hospitable, our courteous Don
Lavished all graceful favors on
His unknown guest, a suave and grateful guest,
When his good host escorted him to rest.

But at the earliest dawn, a savage yell
Disturbed our sleep. On startled ears it fell.
The honoured guest, with an accomplice, crept
From the hospitable plaza while it slept !
Was he a thief ? The lithe and boyish form
Mounted beside him, poor bird in a storm,
Was but the frailest, tenderest child in years,
To be reproved and pardoned after tears.

“ Were they both thieves ? Five minutes, five, no more,
And their pursuers numbered half a score.
The outraged Don close at my saddle spurred,
And Spanish blessings were not all I heard.
My steed, an Arab of untainted blood,
Knew not to pause for roaring fire or flood,
And soon outstripped the Don and all the pack,
Yelping like blood-hounds on a victim's track.

“ He was a brick, my valiant Diabello,
A noble, gallant, most true-hearted fellow !
Hunting in jungles to this sport was tame.
I singled out the stripling for my game,
And as we thundered over sands and boulders,
A wealth of raven tresses swept his shoulders ;
Shy, anxious glances peering o'er the tresses
Expressing stronger fear than man expresses ;
As I a note of exclamation mumbled,
My stallion faltered, grasped the bit, and stumbled.

“ He was as knowing as the keenest human,
And courteous as a lord to any woman.

Why! Donna Inez many a time and oft,
Had pressed his great head in embraces soft.

“So, when he halted, could I urge him forward,
My own fast oozing courage turning coward?
The youngest one a woman was I knew;
Could I avoid the inference I drew?
Or that Diabello was past control,
When the Don joined us with a raging soul?

“Escape? Of course! We had no other steed
To match Diabello in pluck and speed,
And he was lame, limped with a weary gait, —
’Tis hard to kick against the pricks of fate!
But his great eyes were full of silent laughter
As the checkmated Don came ambling after.

“Donna Inez had met the rogue at school,
Even at the Convent, where such stringent rule
Envroned all their budding maidenhood
To force an erring nature into good.
All her shy tricks, sly glances, tempting smiles,
Were a light practice in coquettish wiles,
That, till the lagging Olen should appear,
She shot at any target that was near.”





LETTER VIII.

WAGON WHEEL GAP.

A SOLID rampart at our right
The Rio Grande close to left,
On its far bank a lowland bright
And hills by little gulches cleft,
A few rods, and the lowland meets
Another rampart, then the twain
Like leaders of two rival fleets
Seem bristling fierce to clash again.

As Saxon Harold's far-famed wedge
With force behind for instant needs,
And point of power on river edge,—
The rampion at our left, recedes,
Its wedge like arm slow widening out,
A valley's narrow girth about,

While the opposing height uprears,
At intervals small corps of spears,
Nor once forgets its awful frown,
Or lays its regal grandeur down.

Yet as the valley opens wide
Eye fails to note its lofty pride.
The rather turns where bright and sweet
Green slope and silver river meet,
And fancy hears a wondrous song,
In every wave that rolls along.

A half mile stretch the valley shows,
Before two walls again enclose
The Rio, whose encroachments lave
Their granite base with treacherous wave,
Till scarce a bridle-trail is seen
The rock and river bank between.

“Magnificent!” I cry. Our Tenor speaks.
“Wagon Wheel Gap!” like file on saw it creaks.
Wagon Wheel Gap! Oh Pan, among the willows
Fringing the river, left you not one reed,
One swaying note upon the silver billows,
To help that mortal in his hour of need
That thus he called it? The unrythmic name
Suggests no beauty worthy of its fame —
With watchtower, turret, buttress, battlement,
Clear cut against the yielding firmament.

Enter we here the unroofed barbican
Where guarding moat, covered by drawbridge, ran.
There, wary sentinel a vigil kept
On the invading legions, as they crept

'Neath the beleaguered fort, whence massive stones
Buried them with their yet muttered groans.
See! the huge boulders lie, as fiercely thrown
By wrath that matched the force of a cyclone.
The Rio Grande washes verdant banks,
That offer ceaselessly their voiceless thanks.
Above, two thousand upright feet on high,
The castellated ramparts pierce the sky.

And, as the eye up-gazes, creeps the chill
Of shuddering awe; unshapen terrors fill
The cowering heart, untensing every nerve.
What if that towering magnitude should swerve
An atom from its central gravity! —
Never so certain looks eternity
As where those perpendicular columns lean
Towards the speck of blue that glints between;
Or man's magnificence a thing so small,
As 'neath the shadow of that hanging wall.

Wise ones aver near here a lake once stood,
Its boundaries crushed by some o'erwhelming flood
That sent its waters thundering into space,
Leaving geology to track the place.
In musty archives of Old Mexico,
A priest, 'tis said, rudely essays to show
That a grand lake of beauty all untold,
Fed by great streams that washed the mountains' gold,
Lay in a mighty cañon to the West —
Imagination has supplied the rest.

Better the Tenor's legend suits my mood,
And yours, I ween — if not as true, as good.
You have a lurking taste for the antique.
You cannot hear my charming comrade speak,
And miss the shades of humor, quaintly droll,
That add a flavor to our pleasant stroll.
We saunter as we talk beside the river,
Just where those towering bluffs can make us shiver :
The bridle rein thrown lightly o'er the arm,
The great pine trees shading us to a charm ;
Prairie and range filling the hazy West,
The fervid blue wrapping us round with rest,
And my companion's handsome figure leaning
Slightly, to emphasize some shade of meaning.

LEGEND.

This gorge, a splendid barricade
Against the entrance of a foe,
Once saw a grand barbaric show,
A gorgeous Indian cavalcade :
Pursuing Prince, whose comely mien
So won upon his people's grace,
'Till he, as by acclaim, had been
Counted of perfect form and face,
And chosen living sacrifice
To glow upon the altar stone
An offering to their gods. Alone
Of fitting worth and price.

War with unsparing hand, had given
Him countless victories ;
His captives' cries uprose to heaven
As clouds from sacrifice.
But palled these joys when Love appeared,
Vested in many charms,
All tender witcheries endeared
By vague and veiled alarms.

And that which thro' his budding years
Had rounded each desire,
Now harvested a score of fears,
Scorching his soul like fire ;
And renegade to faith, to all
But pleading Love, he proved,
Fleeing the solemn festival,
To clasp the form he loved.

There, where the hanging turret stands,
'Tis said, the truant brought his love,
And with his own unaided hands,
Hurled missiles from above.
The Indian cohorts filed beneath
With martial songs and banners flying ;
There many a warrior met his death,
Where prowess and despair were vieing.

Two days he held his lonely tower
Against a legion's centered power ;
Nor might e'en then his fate controlled —

In legends where the tale is told
Force shares the bays with stratagem —
As rear detachments closely hem
Their ranks round the devoted pair,
With all the fervor of despair,
He folds around her budding grace
The shelter of his last embrace.
As with rude shouts the air is rent,
He leaps above the battlement,
And falls a mangled mass beneath,
Blunting the barbed shaft of death.





LETTER IX.

LEGEND OF BELLOWS CREEK.

As on we move spreads out a broader view,
By mountains edged, old friends with graces new,
Patches of snow, and shades of tender green
At intervals in sheltered nooks are seen,
And far before us, to the distant West,
A peak, St. Mary's, in full ermine dressed.
She wears all summer an unspotted crest.
The hills beneath, just bursting into bloom,
Show vivid contrast to the rugged gloom
Of "timber-line," used here to designate,
A ponderous majesty that carries weight,
Being so high beyond most human reach,
It merits reverence and careful speech.

An undulation hides the upper vale.
Perforce our foreground must take up the tale.
The South side shows its breeding : stature low,
More graceful profile, sunny, dimpled brow,
With aspens, varied foliage, and pines
In rounder forms and finer, softer lines.

Our Northern rampart still close contact keeps,
Not quite so near to where the Rio creeps,
Tho' in as haughty majesty looks down
From beetling front, with never softening frown,
Till suddenly it ends.

A torrent rushes
Beneath a canopy of willow bushes ;
The Rio Grande intervenes between.
We breast its current, and a rugged scene
Of Northern strength, sublimity and might,
Grand beyond measure, bursts upon our sight :
Uneven pyramids of uncouth rocks,
Upheaved by floods or fierce volcanic shocks,
Here square their front in a defiant shield ;
Once to o'erwhelming pressure forced to yield,
They dare attack from any lesser power
And watch in solemn calm a coming hour.

Tho' near the "Gap," a differing air they bear,
Hardly so rugged, for the outlines wear
The grace of greenness. Gleams of color fling
A wondrous freshness where they deign to cling.
This torrent has a "gap." Methinks they all
Were placid lake or joyous waterfall
In the fair days when all the earth was new
And but the Maker's eye beheld the view ;
Since in enchantment held by alchemy,
Till the millenium shall set them free,
And send them lightly leaping, gaily dashing
O'er their old tracks, in sunlight brightly flashing —

Huge rocks and leaping torrent — glorious sight !
Our Tenor, watching my unfeigned delight,
Tells me this legend. Gulch and granite peaks
Bristle with living armies as he speaks :

LEGEND.

This creek, the wise ones say, was once a river,
Bore on its bosom many a birchen boat ;
Its history, for us, has passed forever,
Saving one only legend worthy note.

No deed of might ; only a simple story,
Dear to the poet, few of words, soon told ;
But like a jewel in a crown of glory,
Does more illumine its garniture of gold :—

Tezco, a petty chief, whose greatness shines
Like a grey ruin overhung with vines,
Had no ancestral lineage, no name,
Save that his own strong hand had won from fame.
By gracious manners, from his earliest years,
He won the admiring favor of his peers ;
And when a signal service to the crown
Brought more substantial gifts, with more renown,
When, to arrest the North invader's course,
His the strong fortress at the river's source,
With twice ten hundred spearmen held in fief —
Lived in the land no more beloved chief.

Love found him there — scaled over rampart walls,
Entered unbidden guest within his halls ;

Tempted his eagle spirit to defy
All chance, and set its soaring flight too high —
On Lamia, daughter of a race of kings,
Who saw, unmoved, his martial garnishings ;
While scornfully a haughty father spurned
At honors prowess had so newly earned,
Till Tezco's fiery passion writhing died,
Pierced by a shaft from his own wounded pride.

But the fortune of war brought the arrogant sire
With the monarch of Tezco at strife, where the fire
Of the chief's fearless eyes, flashing back to his own,
Defiant as fate in their confidence shone.

An army behind him, unused to defeat,
Whose furious onslaught precluded retreat,
By wedging the ranks of the foe as they part, —
Many swords strike as one when the chief sways the
heart.

As a pine in a forest of aspen uprears,
Its crest o'er the nodding, pale plumes of its peers,
So Tezco, above the fierce battle is seen
In snowy white helmet with feathers of green.

Arms bare to the shoulder, his proud throat is bare,
His keen falcon glances flash hither and there,
He strikes with both hands as, disdaining a shield,
His voice, like a bugle-note, sounds o'er the field.

He strides like a giant 'mid arrow and spear,
He bears a charmed life that no missile comes near,
As he hews out a way thro' a forest of foes,
Who fall as the trees at the wood-cutter's blows.

Is he stricken with fear, or asatiate with blood
That suddenly alters the bent of his mood?
He pauses with sword raised, the battle unwon,
While his breastplate of feather-work gleams in the sun.

Ah! there in his pathway, down-crushed by disgrace,
A mist of white hair streaming over his face,
Slight wounded, but pierced to the spirit full sore,
Lies the king, and the strong arm is valiant no more.

The space of a breath o'er his captive he stands
A victor, then dashes the sword from his hands,
And kneels to the fallen, on each cheek imprints,
'The kiss of a pardon that prince gives to prince,
And there at the feet of the conqueror died,
Wholly vanquished by love the last vestige of pride.

A shout from both armies surged over the field,
Abandoned the sword was, discarded the shield,
And children to Tezco and Lamia grew,
In beauty, like flowers that are covered with dew.

We do not ford again, but keep the pass
Known as the "Old Ute trail." This, progress has
Discarded for a road exacting toll,
That pound of flesh to many a weary soul.

I am enchanted with my charming friend,
Keep wondering if his stories have an end.
Guessing my thoughts he speaks : " In early days
When jacks were means of transport, and our ways
For transportation, unbroke trails, now seen
As fading pencil-marks among the green,
I 'freighted,' led a reckless, vagrant life
Full of vicissitudes, with dangers rife ;
Yet learned I much to yield a poet pleasure,
Could he but touch the spring that guards the treasure —
Legend of haunted gulch and charmed steep,
Or tale historical, full good to keep ;
For, true or fabulous, they hold a place
Among the folk-lore of a dying race.

"The Utes dwelt in this valley when I came
First on this trail. Their chief, unknown to fame
Yet friendly-minded, spoke my native tongue
Better than all I met, and would prolong
The night till morn, filling my open ears
With just such tales as youth insatiate hears."





LETTER X.

A POET'S ROMANCE.

TO-NIGHT we camp upon the plain —
The rolling clouds are big with rain ;
And waiting for a burro-train
Is not a pleasant duty.
Our supper's in those wandering sacks
Which faith has anchored to their backs —
A hungry poet sadly lacks
An inspiring sense of beauty.

Our lazy Tenor half asleep
Does slyly thro' drooped lashes peep,
While merry songs in snatches creep
Between his exclamations, —
I, every thought on supper rife,
Keep wondering if a camping life
Has compensation for its strife,
Its flesh-thorns and vexations.

Oh ! who spurs fast to join our feast ?
A fair and three times welcome guest
In pluméd hat and habit dressed, —
No city belle completer ;

She rides her mustang with the grace
Of Dian, in the sacred chase ;
My host, catching her half-hid face,
Murmurs "La Signorita."

My hunger flees, for at a glance
A poet catches a romance
And would not miss the slightest chance
To win immortal honor.
Our suave and gracious cavalier,
With bare head slightly bent to hear,
Does by attentive glance appear
To wait upon her.

They speak the sweet Castilian tongue —
Liquids of pearl on amber strung ;
As if a passionate utterance sprung
To lips that speak ;
And all Spain's vanished glory glows
In almond eye, and damask rose,
That with the purple current flows
'Thro' rounded cheek.

The cynosure of every eye,
Yet thro' no movement could you spy
If other than the one was by
Who listened to her ;
Her calm position statuesque,
Her graceful drapery picturesque
Her *tout ensemble* arabesque —
No etching truer.

Presto ! the scene has changed : our cavalier
With call to supper asks this queen to share,
And, not to be outdone in courtesy
She has consented smiling charmingly.
A burro-saddle is her royal seat,
A blanket footstool for her dainty feet, —
With small lace kerchief spread upon her knee,
She holds tin cup and court with equal ease.
Her broken English is a chime of bells,
Her silvery laughter in low ripples swells,
And every miner at our humble board
Comforts himself as knight and noble lord.

Protecting tho' the manner of my host,
I marvel at her confidence the most.
"She seems," I said, "to have no thought of fear,"—
"Nor has she cause," he answered; "I am here."
His hand, as half unconscious, touched his belt,
Wholly conclusive argument I felt.

Poets have earned the right to moralize
On human hopes, and human fallacies,
But I am so convulsed with secret laughter
I'll tell my tale, and think a moral after.

For my romance fell with a mighty crash,
As fairest structures will, a total smash ;
The father Don, and his surviving daughter
Are camped below us on the stream of water
The early settlers christened "Bellows Creek
(Not from its aptness, nor euphonious Greek).

The hapless Don, seeing our cavalcade,
"La Signorita" sent to seek our aid —
Their bronco horses, absent on French leave
Have left the stricken camp to rave and grieve,
Her nag the only creature left to ride ;
And he, inflated with true bronco pride,
Will not permit another soul to mount —
And thus I have my story to recount.

A camping party never ties its horses —
Freedom recuperates the wasted forces,
And 'tis no trifle to reclaim a brute
Who travails all creation to recruit ;
For he most shrewdly takes his cue from man,
With freedom given pilfers all he can,
Recklessly kicking at a coaxing rein
That aims to win to duteous paths again —
'The burro adding his sonorous screech
In vindication of abuse of speech —
A trick some humans have, perchance the shoot
Left lurking from a kindred parent-root ;
Men are of different gifts as well as shapes,
Why not from asses sprung, as well as apes ?

Man's not the only creature to abuse
The gifts the gods have given him to use,
But he alone, alas ! can rhapsodize,
On liberty extolling to the skies,
Yet in his rhapsody forgets to paint,
The highest liberty as self restraint.

WHO COMES TO COLORADO?

Who comes to Colorado
To spy a naked land,
Should stay his steps in summer
Beside the Rio Grande ;
Altho' no brook of Eschol,
Most lovely to be seen,
Its silver waves caressing
A thousand isles of green —

Isles, breathing still of Eden,
For there the sweet wild-rose
Scatters her dainty perfume
To every wind that blows ;
Far-stretching to th' horizon
Are massive peaks on guard,
Lest the encroaching river
Usurp their barren sward.

A soft ascent of meadow,
Foothills of tender brown,
Whose sunflecked pines and aspen
Temper the range's frown ;
Their beetling brows as arid
As the Sahara waste,
Rivaled by crowns of verdure,
Or snow as Dian chaste.

Rest, an embodied spirit,
Marshals the columned clouds
That serried crests envelope
In spotless, fleece-white shrouds,
Their shapes serenely rolling
Against a sky so blue,
'The peace past understanding'
Seems just beyond the view.

It shadows all the landscape,
Touches the rugged pine,
Till rock and jagged boulders
In novel beauty shine,
With the great rolling river
Onrushing at his feet,
The naked land fades surely
Into a charmed retreat ;

And when a gorgeous sunset
Stencils the river's banks,
Where the great San Juan ranges
Part their defiant ranks,
His eyes may feast on beauty,
Watching distracted rays,
Astray in boundless ether
And dizzy with amaze ;

Behold familiar colors
Transform before his eyes,
Till words are faint to picture
Their ever-changing dyes —

Till orange, green and purple
Merge into jasper brown,
And the lost waifs of amber
Brighten the evening's crown.

Who leaves a world behind him
To seek a restful land,
Will find a poet's haven
Beside the Rio Grande ;
His heart will throb exultant,
All carking care repressed,
When he can hear the river
Chanting a hymn of rest.





LETTER XI.

LEGEND OF THE DEVIL'S GATE.

I HALF suspect a feeling more than kind
Lurks treacherous in our handsome Tenor's mind
"La Signorita" -ward. Some lover's freak
Commands that all the truant broncos seek ;
And acts, whose motives show no other cause,
Are easy to adjudge by Cupid's laws.

'Tis Sabbath morning and your church bells ring
Clear to the Rockies, faintly whispering
Thro' memory's chords some feelings of regret.
The hunting party is not gathered yet,
And my good host, too restless far to wait,
Suggests we wander to the Devil's Gate ;
I, hardly knowing if it leads beyond,
Follow in simple faith, as crude as fond.

This Willow Creek in which is pitched our tent
Comes thro' the Gate, by mountain torrents sent
Down to the Rio Grande. 'Tis a vent
Of narrow boundaries, but impetuous force
When winter's melting treasures swell its course.

Towards the gorge on either hand uprise,
Crested with pine, hills clad in sober guise,
Nor yet so near but an expanse is seen,
Of sky and shapely terraces between,
While to the left, bordering upon the plain,
The work of fire or flood appears again.

Piled in fantastic heaps one's fancy drapes
The jagged rocks with all imagined shapes :
An Abbey turret with its belfry spire
Is clearly seen, perhaps a funeral pyre
Was kindled there for holy monk and friar ;
A knightly figure, half-hid by a shield,
With sword and helmet ready for the field.

The force which flung these relics to the left,
From crown to foot a wall of porphyry cleft,
Leaving two columns of unequal height,
Clean-fronted, living trophies of its might,
And almost could a clasp unite again,
So small an interval divides the twain.
On either side the Devil's Gate they loom,
Seeming to guard the very keys of doom.

Somber and grey are the enchanted halls
Enclosed by nature's uncemented walls.
Barely in other cañon is surpassed
This rugged grandeur. Guarding portal passed,
The awe of mystery about us cast,
We enter sacred ground, where vaulted roof
Recedes in sentient majesty aloof

From earthly contact. Shrub-clad, tier on tier
Of rocky terraces like steps appear
Enticing up ; — but deer or antelope
Could scarce keep footing on their treacherous slope.

The gorge, in depth perhaps three thousand feet,
Breaks at one side where rival torrents meet.
These have hewn out a path from snows remote
To join the river ; with triumphant note
Over their rocky barriers they gloat.
Here is the name of Devil's Gate most apt
Ledge upon ledge of shapeless granite capped
By ledge on ledge of more. No horse can climb
The savage steep, defiant but sublime ;
And man were mad to dare so rash a deed,
For, where beyond, the Devil's Gate may lead
No mortal knows, they say, and none can see —
It seems to vanish in eternity.

“Te Deum Laudamus !” The silver-keyed voice
Rolled up thro' the cañon an anthem of praise,
The song of a soul over-burdened with joys,
A child giving thanks to the author of days.
Oh ! fill your cathedral arches with hymns,
Trill symphonies learned with a well-tutored tongue !
But the notes that upswell when the heart overbrims
Is the grandest “Laudamus” that ever was sung.

An eagle, poising on a shelving rock,
Seems like a cynic critic come to mock.

With ceasing anthem, up aloft he springs,
A small tornado in his whirring wings.
He swoops anear; a shriek of mortal pain
Follows his wake as he upsoars again
With prey held fast in talons keen to hold.
His savage eyes are fearsome to behold —
A shot well aimed, and at our feet he lies,
Defiance but no pleading in his eyes,
For, king in life, king to the last, he dies.

LEGEND.

Our Tenor, toying with the great dead bird
Spake musingly : “ A marvelous tale I heard
About this cañon from the old Ute chief —
A marvelous tale not easy of belief,
Tho’ none so potent of the gifts of Jove,
For good or evil, as a woman’s love.

“ Prince Creto, scion of a Northern race,
To Arthur’s virtues adding Launcelot’s grace,
When summer spread her blazonry of flowers,
Brought here his bride to pass new-wedded hours
Strange, in a frame already bent and old,
Was the chief’s ardor, as he glibly told
Over her beauties : eloquent his tongue,
And every word in portraiture was strong.
The good prince won eulogiums, if more mild,
Still fond as father doting gives his child,
Quick to reward or praise he was, and brave,
Courteous to noble, gracious to the slave,

And in his royal carriage to his bride
A very god of love personified.

But Tezcalla aweary soon became
Of love so loyal as Prince Creto's flame ;
Potiphar's wife yields us a prototype
In every clime, and Helen's world-wide name
Hangs up by Cleopatra's, barely ripe.
Beside some moderns, emulous of fame,
This northern queen only a glorious brute ;
Decoyed as sweetly as her whiter kin,
Offered the ashes of a Dead sea fruit,
And called the glamour love, which gilt the sin.

Her noble liege, if seeing, made no sign
Save that a mocking devil lit his eyes ;
In generous nature faith most hardly dies —
Yet brought he to quick shape a dear design.

A bridge of stone, 'tis said, this cañon spanned
In that far time — six men could walk abreast
Across the arch ; and here the monarch planned
To build an eyrie for secluded rest,

Where like an eagle he could look aloft
Above the world, defy the whims of fate,
Rear his young brood beside his royal mate,
Nor know if men approved, or rudely scoffed,

Then all his busy slaves their knowledge plied ;
The cañon echoed to the tramp of feet ;
There came Tezcalla, undulating sweet,
Her paramour full often at her side.

Prince Creto gracious, asked their wisdom here
Should this be thus ? or so ? or even so ?
Like coals the devil in his eyes would glow,
Yet felt they no forboding thrill of fear.

Finished the palace, bravely garnitured
With every dainty to be bought of gold ;
And in a spot so lovely to behold
Seemed not already perfect bliss assured ?

A lover's paradise, with tempered light —
One tiny window hewn thro' solid stone.
Prince Creto made the end a gala night,
Bade queen and lover sup with him alone.

Flowers weighed the air with langorous perfume,
Rich and rare viands graced the princely feast,
Seductive music sensuous swelled and ceased
As the charmed guests surveyed the banquet-room.

Prince Creto bade them eat. "Each dish," he said,
"Was subtly poisoned, and all rare device
Had decked the food whereby they must be fed
Unless for daily wants love should suffice." —

Then left he with a smile of courteous grace
A great stone door rolled up to close them in.
Below, the slaves were marshalled into place
And outward marched to songs and martial din,
Joyously rose the strains ; far echoes woke
To answering glee ; speeding the mirth along,
These giant pillars caught the life of song
And into raptures broke.

Night in celestial robes of blue and gold
Above the host a cloudless arch spread over ;
Into the sanctity of loved and lover
A flood of music rolled.

But music there in dainty cunning failed —
Was it the tiny window was so small
That as the swelling circles reached the wall
Echo but shrieked and wailed ?

The solitude masked those sounds retained,
Varying the shrillest cry with savage shout,
Tenacious to the rocks they twined about
And ceaselessly complained.

While early autumn winds played soft and cool
Among the garlands in September's hair ;
When morn her toilet made in sleepy pool, —
Those notes crept even there.

When purple mists against the foothills hung
And breeding peace with tender noon-day fell
On the deserted valley like a knell —
Out clear that echo rung.

'Tis said the zenith of September's reign
Brings back those awful sounds,
And as upon that night, the gorge again
With agony resounds.

The gentle Prince incarnate fiend became,
A terror to his followers as his foes ;
A scourge upon the land, a brand of shame —
As plant unduly urged to garbage grows.

A century after, one unwall'd the door,
A sight beheld that well nigh had unmanned
The lover prone upon the dust clad floor,
Tezcalla, poniard raised in fleshless hand.





LETTER XII.

LEGEND OF SUNNYSIDE.

As we emerged beyond the pale immortal,
Our Tenor left me at the outer portal.
I found the camp deserted. Solitude
To-day a little jarred upon my mood ;
And so it fell, the plain which westward lies
Assumed enticing outlines in my eyes —
A mountain torrent changes every scene.
I 've learned the sign: a strip of willow green ;
Nor fails it here, for there a fisher stands,
Air all absorbed, rod clenched in steady hands,
I read suspicion rousing in his glance.
He takes my measure with a leer askance
And by some subtle instinct instant sees
"I am a Tenderfoot, sir, if you please."

Contempt is the first feeling in his mind,
The next, a careless thought a shade more kind,
At which, if self-esteem takes no offence
One's chance to gain his good will is immense.

I swallow mine, and step to royal favor,
As witness, all his subsequent behavior.

He bade me share his dinner, trout and deer,
Food fit for gods, if lacking other cheer ;
But he could talk, not like our Tenor truly —
Words not so classic, grammar more unruly ;
Miner he was, his camp at Sunnyside —
The world for him held little else beside.
Once in his cabin, all the gracious ease.
Which gratifies by a desire to please
Charmed, as no luxuries without it can,
The welcome of a hospitable man.
Our meal he cooked himself, and while we dined,
My eager questioning called this tale to mind : —

LEGEND.

A few log cabins nestling in the bushes,
A narrow valley laughing in the sun ;
A mountain stream, that ever widening rushes
To swell the river and its life is done.

Now Miner's Creek, but when Chulo was reigning,
His language called it "Gold-gleam from the West."
T'was broader, rougher, flowed as now complaining
To the grey Rio Grande, seeking rest ;

And legends say, to dark-skinned Aztec daughters
Testing the charm of tempted Marguerite :
"He loves, he loves me not" — the sun-flecked waters
Failed never to return an answer sweet.

There buried in a waste of rude foundations
Are Aztec relics crudely carved in stone ;
Cemented walls of ruined habitations,
Tokens of luxury in ages gone.

And history says, a people glad of spirit,
Blest of the gods, dwelt happy in this vale ;
Haunts that the beaver and the fox inherit
Once rang in triumph to a marvelous tale.

Oh, young Lochinvar tho' he came from the West ;
May doff his gay bonnet and lower his crest ;
For proud tho' the plumes which his valor may wave,
As brilliant the glory of Chulo the Brave !

The swiftest of foot, and the lightest of hand,
His war trophies counted by scores in the land !
His spears were bedecked by the pride of the fair
And no passage of arms but his courage would dare.

An army victorious returning in pride
Bore chained with its victims, his terrified bride,
And barbed the arrow fear plunged in his breast
To fetter his actions and torture his rest.

She saw him look on with a stupified stare,
Nor knew in that gaze couched the strength of despair;
No offer could ransom, no prowess could save,
If failed her the strong arm of Chulo the Brave.

The holiday crowd in their gala attire
Stood waiting the touch of the torch to the fire,

The choristers chanted the hymnal of life,
The priest at the altar had whetted the knife —

When swift as the lightning outdarts from the sky
And blinds by its swiftness, with leap and a cry,
Undaunted hung Valor the shambles above,
And bore off the doomed on the pinions of Love ;

The swiftest of foot, like a hind from the dart,
Scoured over the plains with his bride on his heart ;
And fierce tho' the shout of the blood-waiting throng,
His triumph is lauded in story and song.

He fled to this valley and founded a race
Of giants in stature, Apollos in face,
As gentle of spirit as stalwart and bold —
A nation of Nimrods and delvers for gold.

Their gods were the patrons of sunshine and showers,
Their incense the increase of fruit and of flowers.
As never a life on their altar was spent,
'Tis marked as the epoch of Peace and Content.

Thus subtly the meshes which Cupid inwove
Taught even a savage the beauty of love,
And placed on the records of Love and of War
This Chulo the Brave by our own Lochinvar.





LETTER XIII.

STRANGE THEMES.

CAMP breaks this morning, come the jacks
To their old fare, abuse and thwacks,
With sober faces, comic leer
Too innocent to be sincere,
Eager for mischief, miss no chance
To give some luckless wight a dance,
Stealing his socks, his towels, his soap,
His shirt, his shoes, his packing rope
No earthly trifle comes amiss —
All he can reach a dainty is,
While curses rattle quick and loud
Like hail-stones thro' the thieving crowd.

We ford the river to the public road,
My host and I. The burros with their load
Follow the trail, a narrow mountain pass
O'erhanging many a gorge and deep crevasse ;
Deep Creek, in mass of swaying willows buried,
By its commotion seems intensely hurried,

Like local politician, pompous, loud,
Compelling notice from the passing crowd.
Where the main road circles — a narrow curve
By its impetuous fury forced to swerve —
A rustic habitation lately stood.
A great stone chimney, yawning mouthed and rude,
With signs of life strewing the arid plain,
And some charred embers, now alone remain.

The curve at Deep Creek passed, we reach a height
Where an enchanting valley meets our sight,
And by the curling line of blue grey smoke
I know 'twas there our scattered camp awoke
Tho' everywhere do gleams of beauty float,
Our Tenor never yet has hummed a note.
I wonder, but respect the silent mood,
Knowing 'tis thus the muses should be wooed.

Abruptly to the left a tiny square
Of rough hewn poles, arranged with rigid care,
Tell to the passer by a grave is there.
Said I, "He is unhappy who thus sleeps
In solitude where never any weeps."

"Blessed they are," our Tenor quick replied;
"Babes of that home who both one midnight died,
Where with the followers of the rude storm king
Entered Death's messenger on noiseless wing.

"I missed my playmates, they were wont to greet
My coming with delight, half shy, all sweet,

Not long my absence ; but the awful lull
That welcomed my return was pitiful.
But, now, I seem to see the white-robed pair,
Hand clasped in hand, haunting the very air,
A breathless calm circles the ravine round
As we were trespassing on holy ground."

"Has death no terrors?" "Nay, when such he weaves
Among the golden ripeness of his sheaves,
He but a messenger of peace can prove,
Offering the best gift in our Father's love.
What is death but a moment of eclipse
To rest our eyes before the dazzling beams
Of perfect day across our vision streams ;
To weary hearts fainting with weight of wrong
The last inn on a road too rough and long.

"Who would live alway? With the pulse of youth
Beats faith in God, and trust in manhood's truth.
Life then is good, death but a goal far off,
Neither a theme for terror nor for scoff,
Simply fulfillment of establishing laws, —
Until some priest-lore in his faith point flaws ;
Priests hold death as a scourge above their slaves,
Cross-bones and skulls, the charnel house and graves,
With the great judgment and a judge's curse
Symbolled in funeral pomp and somber hearse
Till we take symbols for the symbolized —
And fear a boon the wiser ancients prized,

“What can we give to our beloved? No joy
So all unmixed but on the taste will cloy,
No gift without a canker at its heart,
No precious thing but can conceal a smart,
And death is God’s last boon, divinest, best
Giving earth’s weary children perfect rest.”

I asked his creed. “The question presses close.
My duty is to lighten human woes,
To smooth the pathway for the frail and weak,
To help my brother open his pay-streak,
Give him a ‘grub stake’ if the case require,
And keep the widow in a cheerful fire.

“In sober truth, the gist of modern creeds
Is like a wilderness of swaying reeds,
Thro’ which it takes a keener eye than mine
To find the one trail to the Will Divine.
Form seems to rule, the Father of us all
Is wholly hid by gilded ritual,
Sinners are cloaked and hypocrites are rife,
’Tis insufficient for our Western life.

“You smile; but Western life is earnest, real
We need a creed we can apply and feel,
We want our souls untrammelled as our feet,
To pray or sorrow at the mercy-seat.
In inquisitions no device of pain
Concealed a torture like the viewless chain

Which early faith binds to a victim's heart.
I've seen its power at work with cunning art,
And speak whereof I *know*. Our rugged life
Is a continuous war, a savage strife
To grasp requirements for our daily needs.
We find sparse time to jangle over creeds,
And blest is he to whom one God remains,
Who from his soul can say Jehovah reigns,
When he has wrenched away those early chains.

“A man's coarse nature hardens into flint
With the corroding care and anxious stint
Of urging pennies to a sovereign's duty —
It takes all polish off his sense of beauty ;
And when a woman, dainty born and bred,
High dreams of self-denial in her head,
A martyrdom for love before her spread,
Leading her husband bravely by the hand,
Comes tripping to this grand but churchless land,
The boundless range of all our winter snows
Cannot outlook the prospect of her woes.
So surely as spring suns those snows will clear
Her trust in priest and creed will disappear.

“Even at the best this doleful state obtains.
Bonanzas must be worked, tho' rich and rare.
Labor is king, and misery despot reigns —
No charming outlook for a well-matched pair.

What but blank wretchedness for couples curst
By being tied together at the first.
These rush upon a fate too surely theirs
Without an unknown quantum in affairs.
Man bolstered by society's strong props,
Finds his true status when the scaffold drops.
In a new country he must stand alone,
From native grit rebuild even structural bone ;
Nor is it long before the problem's solved
If grit be there. It never is evolved.

“Woman not brave? You surely do but jest.
All we revere as courage fits her best :
Patience, endurance, hope that looks aloft
Above the lees she has persistent quaffed,
Dependent, timid, shrinking in a crowd —
Here in the open shows a soul embowed,
Throws off inertia, and with half a mate
Wrenches success from the most adverse fate.

“She starts in for a ‘patent’ ; means to win ;
All her high strung physique fierce to begin.
He often faints, discouraged at his stake ;
The ills to be surmounted make him quake ;
And oftener yet alas ! he sits and thinks,
Pities himself, curses his luck, and drinks.

“Shame goads him on, downward and down he goes
Swifter than avalanche of loosened snows,

Then she the brave, fronting the line of war,
Gay colors on her battle axe and car,
Defends the opening breach in her breast-works,
Ignores the traitor who more surely irks ;
Accepts her fate as one divinely given
Even as her creed dictates, red hot ; from heaven.

“ Woman not brave ! Myself have seen her smile,
Belied by the great hunted eyes the while,
Till my soul shrank abashed, dismayed and cowed
Before the spirit in its martyr shroud.

“ What jargon that of a primeval curse !
The odious selfishness of man is worse.
The crawling worm will turn in self defense,
Yet woman holds no right to take offence,

“ Or her imperial lord ; and we, his peers,
Will bring refined tortures, slurs and jeers,
The gibe of ignorance, the smile of scorn,
To make her loathe the hour that she was born.
For these are barbed beyond the cross and stake,
To make the gentle heart of woman quake.
Submission is her pass to life eternal,
As is rebellion to the realms infernal —
One tenet dear to every Adam’s son,
And by his ghostly counsellors passed on.

“ Our nineteenth century culture talks ; but facts,
Stubborn as fate itself, show how it acts :
Our slaves are freed ; dumb brutes upon the street
Allowed to seek redress from all they meet ;

Orphans and waifs by liberal hands are fed;
Our wearied soiled doves housed and comforted;
Our murderers feted, while the prison cells
Of ghastly crimes are decked with asphodels.
But a good woman, neck-yoked to a beast,
Must thankful be, or silent at the least.
The world is breaking from its swaddling bands.
Priests grasp no longer all with impious hands.
Who would be first must stoop for his estate
Of Christian teacher, till men crown him great —
Greatest when his humanity keeps pace
With godlike pity and redeeming grace.
Yet the old superstition firmly holds
That woman is the black sheep in the folds.

“Men have been monarchs of the world so long
There seems but small redress for such a wrong.
A scrap of sympathy perhaps they fling,
But dare not pause to draw the barbed sting.
Not wholly Levites, yet they fear to look
On hearts that custom makes a sealed book;
Shrink back from offering that by all denied,
To pass self-righteous on the other side.

“Suffrage! Oh faugh! That matter is too small;
It hardly touches on the point at all.
The cause lies deeper: in the faith we're taught
That man as lord embodies human thought,
Gives him the right to flee when evils press,
Because by priestly shackles fettered less,

While she is banned by every modern creed;
Therefore is none to fill our Western need.

“For woman here the master-spirit is.
Man warms her heart because she kindles his —
Flesh of his flesh, true helpmeet patient, fond.
Having to-day, she will not look beyond.
With passions like to his, how can she cling
In adoration to a bestial thing —
Besotted, driveling, he who once has been
Her type of manhood. Where disgrace so keen !
Then if her children hunger, God have pity —
Reels to foundation the beleagured city.

“Woe to the craven who has robbed her brood !
Woe to his shackles when they cry for food !
A lioness in fury, faith nor creed
Withstands the home-thrusts of their clamoring need.

“What other love with mother-love compares,
The height and depth of sacrifice so dares ?
That wondrous link between herself and child,
Even before his face on earth has smiled,
Transcends our wisdom ; for ‘to her his eyes’
Ever ‘look up in joy and not surprise.’
Of her he craves his daily mite of food
And later every gift of higher good.
The grave may take his form, but never touch
Save hers must feed or smooth his nightly couch,
What fate betide, she cries before high heaven,
‘Here am I, Lord, and those whom Thou hast given.’

‘Where is it mothers learn their love ? We know
That highest souls its highest type do show —
That these will most endure, and fiercest spurn
At every fetter when resolved to turn.
We should be merciful when such do strive
In desperate strength to keep their babes alive.

“Cases some score I know, and call to mind
This moment one, as dainty and refined
As cities breed, to aptly illustrate
How barbarous even now is woman’s fate.
The country new, temptations hemmed her round,
She held her own saint guarding hallowed ground ;
Still clung to one who, with a silly smile,
Watched every snare, scarce conscious of its guile—
Her church, her priest, her creed, with one acclaim
Chained her to him who honored with his name.

“Sudden and swift the avenging spirit woke,
Thro’ shackles welded by a life-time broke,
Flew in the face of slurs, of taunts and jeers,
With which cold malice settles all arrears ;
Clutched at the helping-hand out stretched to save,
Buried her past in its unhallowed grave,
Defied the tongues of slander,—could she less ? —
And in her own strength wrought her own redress.

“‘The laws of state ?’ Aye, true, they set her free,
But Church laws bind her still in slavery.
Until the Judgment she must bear the shame

“Of casting off allegiance to a name,
That was a brand like a devouring flame.
Whose mission 'tis to bind the broken heart
Have their harpoon within the cankered smart ;
Denied for her most natural behavior
The free gift of the meek and blessed Savior —
Thus man dares measure God's Omnipotence
By his own gauging of a grave offence.

“Hers were the children ! Could their grieving cries
Be made the incense of her sacrifice ?
Could they seek pity in their mother's church,
Would food and shelter gratify the search ?
Full well we know small bounty would be theirs,
Save with her name omitted from their prayers.
For do they starve or beg, alike is flung
The blame at her from each reviling tongue.
'Tis modern chivalry. Alas ! the best,
If not reviling, scourge her with a jest.”

We rode in silence. I was awed, impressed
By strange ideas, in such strong words expressed.
While heart and training were at bitter strife
To reconcile these novel views of life,
There glimmered thro' the fog of education ;
A crude but most uncomfortable sensation :
That life held ills beyond my calculation,
When glancing at his garb, his belt and pistols,
Studded with cartridges as bright as crystals,

A sudden ponderance of the grotesque
Made havoc of the grave and picturesque.

Like sunlight flashing on a shaded stream,
Responsive to my glance did laughter gleam.
"I'll tell you now how we rough miners woo.
It has one merit : it at least is true."





LETTER XIV.

THREE PHASES OF COLORADO LIFE.

COURTSHIP.

I HAVEN'T much to offer,
But on the far hill-side
There is a pine-log cabin
Where I can take my bride.
The door is off its hinges,
The chimney too, does smoke,
It has a nice south window,
But every pane is broke.

The floor is hard and solid,
The roof in places split,
But one day's honest labor
Will make a home of it.
A table and three camp-stools,
Bedstead of undressed pine
Are all its present fixings —
But then, there is the mine !

The North Star in Eureka
Alone will make us rich ;
The Golden Rod in Rico —
I hardly can guess which
Will bring the most hard money,
But one thing I *can* tell :
It won't be long, my charmer,
Before you cut a swell.
Your dresses shall be velvet
As rainbow colors bright,
And sewed with pearls and diamonds —
You'll set the world alight.

Sometimes she "freezes to him,"
Sometimes "her pa's been there,"
Then she mocks at his visions,
Nor gives his suit a care ;
As often is reluctant,
Half promises to wait —
But girls are scarce as oak trees ;
Besides, the whims of Fate !

The mines may prove a "fizzle"—
The bare thought oils his tongue
To trill the same trite raptures
Lovers have always sung.
Original his motto,
Learned in his Western life :
"I've as good a right as any
To take and starve a wife.

Here, "no respect of persons"
Should read "respect of things,"
For sometimes fickle Cupid
Above them folds his wings.
Experiment rash? V-e-r-y!
For practice so no less
Fails often—cabin's small to hold
A howling wilderness!

Laughing I said: "The laws of compensation
Should yield such marriages self-approbation;
There seems but little else save prospects only,
To keep the wedded one from growing lonely."
"Oh!" he replied. "The art of living lies
Less in possessions than imaginings.
A miner from his dungeon on the heights
Evolves alike his sorrows and delights.
Hope to reality his life transforms,
Intensifies his sun, and gilds his storms.
'A Christmas in the cabin' will relate
How slightly trifles do affect his state:"

CHRISTMAS IN THE MINER'S CABIN.

High over peaks whose ermine crest
It crowned with rainbow dyes,
The sun smiled in th' expectant West
And tinged the purple skies;
A blaze of brightness o'er the plains
Its slanting radiance threw,
And from the cabin's dirt-grimed panes
A gleam of welcome drew.

He paused to gaze. Th' uplifted latch,
From nerveless fingers sliding,
Let in some truant beams, to catch
A glimpse of what was hiding —
Th' unbroken silence held even then
Spell-bound, a single second.
No more for scattering pearl and gem
Each to the other beckoned.

His lonely plate and sole tin-cup
Flash out in jeweled splendor ;
His meager board is garnished up
By magic, rare and tender ;
His table is a snowy cloth,
His can, urn silver-mounted,
His solitary dip none loth
As gas to be accounted ;
His beans, a dish of raspberries gleams,
His bacon, white-fish toasted,
His shapeless mass of biscuit seems
A dainty turkey roasted ;
A coil of fuse to sausage turns ;
A keg of giant powder
Benignly in the sunbeams burns
A gallon pail of chowder.

A hanging coat bathed in the haze
Assumes the form of human,
Revealing to his startled gaze
The side view of a woman,

He rubs his eyes. That instant dips
Behind the hills the sun ;
Fast each belated truant trips,
Its little task well done.

His home is dark, his board is bare !
"I must have been mistaken ;
'Tis a deceit, there's nothing there
But coffee, beans, and bacon.
Well" — from his pocket takes a stone —
"By Jove ! this is a whopper ;
'Twill go ten thousand to the ton —
Galena and grey copper.

"A million, cash in hand. No less
Can I afford to sell her ;
For two I'll let her slide, I guess,
To that Chicago feller."
So sweet Contentment, which is gain,
Sits down with Hope beside him —
More blest than we, who dream in vain,
So venture to deride him.

AT "THE BRIDGE."

"Old friends, old scenes will lovelier be
As more of heaven in each we see."
So sang my heart as the grey river glassed
The arch of heaven within it, as it passed,
Rolled over tiny isles and massive boulders,
A joy forever to entranced beholders.

It is another of those riant spots
Parceling the Rio Grande into dots
Of picturesque and perfect punctuation.
A fixed and striking note of exclamation
Is that pyramidal, cave-punctured rock,
Giant memento of an earthquake shock ;
The bush-decked banks, an undecided colon,
That shrink or swell as waves are low or swollen.

A period the blue arch bending o'er us
To emphasize the Rio Grande's chorus ;
The hills above, beyond, interrogations
Of change in its perpetual gyrations —
The whole unfolding clearly, as we look,
Into a faultless page from Nature's book.

"It is a perfect idyl," I exclaimed.
"Rightly the lovely Rio has been named.
Is it the unexpected yields such pleasure ?
One feels as falling sudden on a treasure,
When these delightful landscapes greet the eyes
Ever with newer and more keen surprise."

"Idyls of Colorado don't seem handy ;
I know none of the lovely Rio Grande.
This one," he said "is commonplace perhaps,
But were our life successive thunderclaps,
We should appreciate a restful lull,
And vote perpetual rumbling vilely dull."

A COLORADO IDYL.

The "Sangre" loomed before us
Forbidding black as night ;
A pall funereal o'er us
Intensified by light ;
Our "jack," our beast of burden,
Disdained our pigmy wrath,
And cheerful seemed the guerdon
Of sleeping in a bath.

A growl like muttered thunder
Boomed from our muleteer ;
"Our jack has slipped from under
And dumped our provender."
Meanwhile looked on that donkey,
Always benignly smiling,
Like some cherubic monkey
Obtuse to all reviling.

Our sugar was the sweetest
Concentered to all taste ;
Our flapjacks were the neatest
Of fancy jujube paste ;
Our coffee, ordered after,
Was truly past compare,
And in a gulp of laughter
We swallowed down a "sware."

The rain poured on, a torrent
In necks and over faces ;
Predicament abhorrent
To all Caucasian races !

We flung our blankets round us,
Striving to cheat the wet ;
And thus the day-close found us,
A rather rueful set.

Just as in burst of splendor
Shone out the dying sun,
Serenely bound to render
Amends for evil done,
He took his dainty pencil,
Limned sky, and clouds, and trees,
With glowing bits of stencil
In rarest traceries.

Gold, orange, salmon, crimson,
Were blended faint with green,
To tip the purple rims on
The clouds that hung between ;
His slanting rays streamed from us
Thro' all the moistened air ;
And one great bow of promise
Made earth divinely fair.

The "Sangre's" summits glowing
In countless hues and dyes,
His snowy raiment flowing
Alive before our eyes,
What wonder fortune beckoned
Above our trifling cares,
And we were in a second
Prospective millionaires?



LETTER XV.

LEGEND OF ANTELOPE SPRINGS GAP.

A CLEFT, or gap, formed by the mighty forces
That Nature brings from fathomless resources,
It bounds the high-way, towering, grand, imposing,
In rugged strength and majesty reposing —
A natural fortress in a time of slaughter,
O'er a ravine without a sign of water ;
Outlines of tower, impervious battlements,
Its stately bulwark to the eye presents.
Westward and to the left stretches a valley
Where legions in united strength might rally.
The snowy range, known as the Great Divide,
Turning all streams to the Pacific side,
Like a whole clan of kings with honors hoary,
Rear their white heads in uncontested glory,
And peer above the pigmy earth below,
Clad in imperial robes of spotless snow,
To the colossal scene of loveliness
A legend adds a touch of tenderness,
And calls to mind the jealous Jewish king
To whom the stripling David used to sing,
Whose harp and voice exorcised from his breast
The friends of wrath and shivering unrest.

Chiapa, monarch of the Ilascalans.
Fought in this valley with the savage clans
Of the rude North ; and as their legends tell,
His trained battalions in vast numbers fell.

He, sick with anger, brooding in his tent,
Fondled the demons, Wrath and Discontent,
And none had power to chase, or exorcise
While death lowered dark from disaffected eyes.

Malia, a youth of marvellous grace,
Like David, fair of form and face,
Left herds untended on the plain,
To watch the carnage and the slain ;
And when the battle paused at night,
By songs turned the dark hours to light ;
Above the camp-fire's ruddy glow
The wond'rous notes would ebb and flow,
Out o'er the ravished army ring,
Until they reached the startled King.

Like Saul, Chiapa, sore oppressed
By spirits he had erst caressed,
Knew neither solitude nor rest.
His wearied courtiers plied in vain
All balms, upon the viewless pain,
Till Malia's voice swelled on the air
As hovers Hope above Despair.

The King, with slowly kindling eye,
Yielded before the melody
That seemed a breath of sorcery,
Forming charmed circles round his head
Till discontent and anger fled,
Leaving armed Courage in his stead.

The stripling's songs brought ever restful peace.
A lavish honor every effort crowned.
Nor here to David does resemblance cease,
For courtiers envied, jealous favorites, frowned ;
Ever full armed, superior fortune brings
A ready host, supplied with slurs and stings.
Short was poor Malia's term of favor ; —
Malice, perchance some crude behavior
(He being but of tender years)
Adds his to many like careers
Fashioned upon a monarch's truth.
The voice of the ill-fated youth
Forgot its cunning, failed to please —
'To bring the chafing tyrant ease ;
And thro' a quick repented burst of ire
Envy and malice gratified desire.

There, where the highest point of rocks
With the blue heaven interlocks,
Clangor from answering peak to peak,
Drowning the hapless victim's shriek
That even pity could not hear —
Forced to the brink by hounding spear,

His comely youth and budding beauty
To glinting-eyed revenge paid duty.
The marshaled legions all afield
In full regalia, spear and shield,
Saw his young body cleave in twain
Before it reached the rock-strewn plain.

Westward the sun in gorgeous dyes
Panoplied peaks and arching skies,
Enwrapped the torn mass in a fold
Of glittering rays like molten gold.
And some aver, his spirit yet
Traverses peak and minaret ;
When sunset hues flood the ravine
A glowing figure may be seen,
White robed like martyred saints of old,
Crested with auriole of gold.

The legend greater credence gains,
That King Chiapa strewed the plains
Lavishly with his noble dead ;
Then, like a coward, basely fled.
Shorn of all former power and glory,
Slighted alike in song and story,
He lived defiant of his fate,
A target for contempt and hate





LETTER XVI.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

TO-NIGHT, a crescent moon sails on a sea
Of blue, as boundless as eternity.
Where a faint tinge of amber lingers yet,
A fading memory tintured with regret.
The gaunt, grey ranges outlined on the shore
Are tender as the days that come no more ;
While radiating from its home afar,
Like deathless Hope, beams forth the evening star,
And silence brooding the divinest calm,
Holds a great chord in Nature's perfect psalm.

“To the ridiculous from the sublime
Is but a step,” an adage old as time.
While our enraptured senses swept the skies,
Drinking in draughts of beauty thro' our eyes,
One spake, (a fellow ever finding motes),
“We're apt to have some wet before she floats” —
Meaning the crescent, and our sudden fall
Was worse than Cæsar's at the Capitol.

We shivered as if rain were making tracks
Already down our unresisting backs,
Nor did it brighten matters, that we knew
Sometimes his horrid prophecies came true.

There are a dozen camp-fires on the plains,
Heavy freight teams, and unpacked burro-trains,
With creatures all alike, save black or white,
I wonder how their owners know the right,
For tho' not birds, beasts are they of a feather,
And fraternize to eat and plot together.

The heavens curtain all, so gemmed with gold,
They are a beauteous marvel to behold.
As I unblest of sleep, pass from the tent
To share with solitude my discontent,
A homesick ache is gnawing at my heart,
All whom I love and I are wide apart;
And this primeval beauty weighs like care.
The massive ranges, crested white or bare,
With foothills into densest shadow cast,
Seem haunted with the spirit of the past.
Their very magnitude is weird, unreal,
Shades undefined across their silence steal
Where the huge peaks in god-like grandeur rise
And god-like keep their buried mystery.

Morning is here and utter desolation
Broods with despair above the whole creation ;
At least on our creation, for tho' small,
Yet being ours that pronoun covers all.

It rained, it rains, and every thing is wet —
Dame Nature liquidates a standing debt,
From parsimony jumps to lavish waste,
Pays compound interest with unseemly haste.
The tent is soaked, and leaks, our clothes and beds
Converted are to watertanks and sheds ;
Shed but a fraction, while the bulk seeps in,
Drenching the raptured dreamer to the skin,
While the foundation of a deluge creeps
Beneath the tent line where he sweetly sleeps.
The wood is damp, and utterly refuses
To lend itself a slave to man's abuses.

This tests a comrade to the very soul.
As in disgust all from their baths unroll
The natural Adam of each one crops out.
Some fling their blankets from them with a flout ;
Some bite their lips ; some vent their wrath in curses,
Show a rebellious spirit at reverses ;
One is quite blessed, the fellow seeking moths :
" We truly have some wet before she floats."
He puts on airs (this people call it style),
Surveys our misery with a pitying smile ;
But abject silence answers him ; the calm
Falls on his self-contentment like a balm,
Till bolder grown, watching our wordless woe,
He drawls out the remark, " I told you so."

'Tis like a bombshell in a magazine,
As quickly makes a havoc on the scene ;

Our much-enduring cook now maddened quite,
Flings down the kindling wood that will not light,
Catches the prophet roughly by the throat,
Hissing between his teeth, "You go and float;
As you' re so glorified because it rains
You ought to have the pleasure for your pains."
He helps him with his boot toe thro' the door,
And coolly turns to try the fire once more.
As if an evil spirit had departed
At the first match a merry blaze up started,
Flashed on the lowering faces in the tent,
Chasing the lingering gleams of discontent ;
Laughter and jest once more resumed their sway
And held a royal carnival all day.





LETTER XVII.

MELODRAMATIC.

THIS wandering life throws you with strange companions
From city streets, mines, mountain-tops and cañons.
Here, nature is in earnest ; if she shines,
She duplicates the mighty Apennines ;
And all her rain a driving torrent pours,
As heaven were emptying long-treasured stores.
To-night it hides the nearer range from view,
And veils the foothills in a dull grey hue.

We gather in the tent, a motley crowd,
Forced by the din to shriek our thoughts aloud.
We have new comers : one, from San Miguel,
I dare aver can spin a merry tale,
Judging him only by his wicked eyes,
Which are but solemn when concocting lies.
He has a swaggering gait, a traveled look,
Knows things you never find in any book,
Enjoys his life with an unanswering jest.
Because of every good he grabs the best.

One other, and at last, oh wondering friend,
What is a "tenderfoot," I comprehend :
He rides in broadcloth, patent-boots, and kids,
See him ! — his eyes half starting from their lids.
It's simply ravishing, just to behold him
Devouring all the marvels that are told him
With a credulity that knows no bounds,
As truth were always robed in startling sounds.
He uses English Latinized : each word
Enunciated to be plainly heard,
His note-book on his knees, with facile fingers,
Skilled in stenography, he never lingers
To sift th' astounding wonders that he hears,
From mining accident to "Injun skeers."

He of the San Miguel speaks native slang,
And emphasizes with a rapid bang ;
The sounds recall Mark Twain's Nevada preacher,
Listening to "Scotty" as a language teacher.
The theme gives broader license to his tongue :
He does not "draw it mild," his scenes are strung
Together with an utter disregard
Of any fitness on the writer's card.

And oh, such tales ! Dumas and Jules Verne
May bury laurels they so poorly earn.
His ingenuity is on the spur,
His eager audience too absorbed to stir ;
For the whole clan abet ; no questioning glance
Reveals a doubt concerning his romance,

And the poor "tenderfoot" is —yes, betrayed
By the companions his distress has made.

He hails from Boston ; most distinctly feels
A super-excellence that pride conceals.
He cannot cast his precious pearls to swine,
Or teach the blind how bright the sun can shine ;
Strives to be courteous, but his best attempt
Is oddly spiced with ill-disguised contempt ;
His curious, prying eagerness to know,
Is like a child's at his first wild-beast show.
Albeit the Boston traveller is no fool,
He has not lost th' ideas he gleaned at school ;
Abhors the Indian of far Mayflower time
As a dark horror native to the clime ;
The savage with the miner still confounds,
Hardly on strictly scientific grounds,
But still he feels the childish thrill of fear
Congeal his blood, when any miner's near.

Dire consequences follow slight effects.
His manners hurt him as he least expects.
Magnetic currents pass from one to one,
Needing no spoken word, no action done ;
Each feels th' antipathy he does not speak,
Repays with interest th' ungenerous freak ;
The Boston swell a churl the miner dubs,
Miner retaliates with jests and snubs,
And ridicule lacks never poisoned barb,
To pierce the web of any human garb.

He of the San Miguel, tho' he has told
Of Indian massacres and fields of gold,
Is telling now a jumbling pack of lies
That in his listener waken no surprise ;
But growing bold and bolder with success,
He mixes dates in reckless lavishness.
He has not seen a score and half of years,
Yet he relates the "horrid Injun skeers
Of '49, when I was in command
Of a small U. S. scouting cavalry band,
All regular muffs, not one fit for the journey ;
My first lieutenant was a learned attorney —
U. S. Chief Justice in the time of Jackson —
A gawky fellow by the name of Paxon ;
The mean red devils pinned him to a stake,
Had piñon piled around him for a bake,
When I rode up, for Uncle Sam demanded
The roast to feed the squadron I commanded —"
"The date," asked the Bostonian, "I opine
You stated formerly — 't was '49."

"Yes," unabashed the graceless youth replied,
"T was in that year that their King Philip died !"
The astounded "tenderfoot" was just a show,
Light breaking on him in a gentle glow.

"Your tender years, pardon me if I err,
Scarcely appear such honors to confer
In '49 ; time has passed lightly o'er you —
You have life's tribulations all before you ;

I do mistake, or fail to understand
Precisely what the date of your command ”

“We don’t grow old out here in Colorado.
It is, you know, a sort of El Dorado;
For me, I’ve seen these hoary, snow-clad ranges
Before my eyes pass thro’ some wondrous changes;
I came here when the plains were lakes and rills
And these great mountains little sandy hills. ”

This was too much ; all joined the shouts of laughter
That shook the tent from pins to ridge-pole rafter,
And to the “tenderfoot” Bostonian told
That as to stories he was badly sold.





LETTER XVIII.

CAMP AFTER RAIN.

CAMP-LIFE has many phases,
But he has lived in vain
Who has not heard the campers
Improvise a refrain
To greet the opening morning,
After a night of rain.

'Tis natural and flowing,
Of flow not easy checked ;
While shapes in demi-toilet
Of many colors decked
Make somewhat more emphatic
The total stage effect.

He is accounted lucky,
Whose garniture is slack,
Who can wring out his garments
And dry them on his back ;
He can soon sum possessions —
Camp outfit and a "jack."

His hand a cudgel carries,
But 'twixt himself and beast,
Their happy state engenders
True harmony at least,
Which to the human partner
Is a perpetual feast.

The glorious sky hangs over,
The hot earth hurts his toes,
The sun pours down obliquely —
And blisters cheek and nose,
Yet in divine contentment,
Serenely on he goes.

For is he not a miner
And life a gorgeous dream ?
The evils of the present
Merge in his silver seam ;
The goal absorbs the passage ;
Things are not what they seem.

He dreams of how to work it,
Where best to ship the ore,
Deposit with some banker,
Or hold the bulk in store
Till he has dumped a billion
Or a few millions more.

Oh, Hope : No other captain
Can muster such reserves
Of tireless strength and muscle
Of tense unflagging nerves,
Till all the quailing body
A willing subject serves.

True, partial are her favors ;
She plods beside the tramp,
For all her airy legions
Abominate the damp,
Make expeditious exit
Beyond the wretched camp.

There evanescent treasures,
Classed with the genus " things,"
Have followed Hope's example
And speedy taken wings.
He only has the dryest
Who gives the hardest wrings.

Each one selects his specials,
Adjusts them on a line,
And all the prairie wonders
To see herself so fine —
A Colorado rainbow
Just pales before that shine.

Our artist caught the spirit,
And while his shirt was drying
He sent his facile fingers
Across his canvas flying.
The natural poise of models
Was wholly gratifying.

Now is the sky all velvet,
No cloud above our heads,
But column upon column
Along th' horizon spreads,
Foretelling that to-morrow
Will have more soaking-beds.





LETTER XIX.

IN ANTELOPE PARK.

I AM sitting now at sunset beside the Rio Grande,
The Rio Grande del Norte, as it winds among the hills
Creeping thro' its rocky cañons like a shimmering
silver band,

Singing as it widens slowly, quavers soft and happy trills,

When the sky above is sapphire, save a gorgeous crimson
streak

That enfolds the Western ranges like a garment edged
with gold,

Spreading as the day grows fainter to the crown of every
peak,

Gathering gleams of green and purple to eke out each
widening fold ;

And the twilight steps on tiptoe thro' the undulating air,
Haunting all the tender solitude with shadows faintly
seen,

Till a tremor half of terror creeps upon you, unaware,
As shades of the departed ones were peopling all the
scene.

"Tis now the hazy future into bold relief is cast,
And the spirit of the cañons wails a dirge above the past :
But a sigh among the piñons thro' the golden afternoon
While the busy sun was fashioning a coronet for June,
Now with voice of tortured demon on the confines of
despair,

He is sobbing out his anguish to the gulches in mid-air.

You can see him gaunt and fleshless, fling his arms
above the ranges,

Warning off the eager present from her pond'rous
work of changes ;

But clear above the clangor progress winds her clarion
notes,

On the summit's nearest heaven her imperial banner
floats.

She has found a way o'er chasms that panthers fear to
leap —

A foothold among crevices where serpent dares not
creep —

Planted stakes on arching ledges that do mock the
eagle's hold,

Only to fling out into light a buried heart of gold.

Little yet her step has tarried in the valley's at our
feet —

She prefers the snow-clad ranges for a royal country seat,
Till the golden heart is blazoned to the eyes of Chris-
tendom ;

In her train no waifs of luxury, no pets of comfort come,

Suffering is her mighty roll-call, want the signal of the line,
Hardihood, unflagging patience, hope supreme and
faith divine.

Hail, braves that join her standard, with scrip and staff
in hand,
With girded loins, with upturned face ! Eyes watching
where you stand,
Shall note the dignity of toil, and from your beacon fires
Borrow a ray of living light to gild new temple spires.
Mount up with wings as eagles, nor faint nor be you weary
Till floats the banner of success above your golden eyrie.

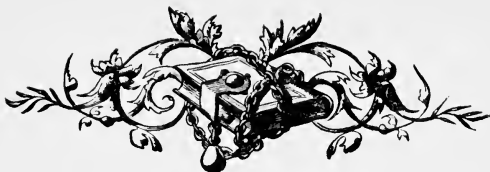
Attained, all great desire narrows down the brilliant
scope
That was spread to huge proportions by the magic
touch of hope,
But this land of untried sources shall spur the world to
dare,
For faith that girds the loins of hope lightens the
very air ;
The blue arch is so perfect, the buoyant breeze so free,
They feed great inspirations like a blast from off the sea,
And surging like to tidal waves glad people thronging
come
To plant upon her rugged breast the altar stone of home.

Man feels the Godhead in his soul, he knows himself
divine,
When upright on these mighty hills among piñon and
and pine.

What wonder lovers turn to thee as flowers turn to the
sun,

O beauteous Colorado, neither coy nor lightly won !
Beloved of thy children, whose one ambition seems
To make the lamp of Aladdin no more a thing of dreams
But a superb reality hewn from thy mountain seams.





LETTER XX.

LEGEND OF ANTELOPE PARK.

ALL nations have some tale to tell
Of timid fawn, or shy gazelle ;
And many a hardy mountain child
Knows where their haunts in covert wild.

One told me this. Her cabin stood
Within a grove of cottonwood
Where, like a group of wordless notes,
The Rio Grande's anthem floats
Echoing thro' cañons straight and tall
As any city's rampart walls ;
And where in lavish beauty grows
The fragile, delicate wild rose,
Of perfume sweet and color faint
As timid maid, or gentle saint.

And not unlike a saint was she
As stately half, half timidly,

She pointed where the shadows lay
In the west cañon, cold and grey,
And told me this, the while her eyes
Grew awed at her own mysteries :

“ Ages ago, before the white man knew
There was a continent he had not seen
Before the Mexicans to power grew —
The northern hordes were govern'd by a queen

“ Called Maxtella, of virtue so supreme
It was the marvel of those evil days ;
Of beauty perfect as a poet's dream,
That language found no words to sing its praise.

“ A vassal chief loved her, but being low born,
Her counsellors spurned him with infinite scorn,
And he in revenge brought his black magic art
To aid in subduing the queen's gentle heart.

“ He brought powers of evil to bear on her will,
Edged 'round all her goings with hindrance cruel,
Changed every quick motive to action so chill
As turned her sweet mercy to pitiless rule.

“ He forced her to speak that she fain would not speak
Commit deeds unholy she fain would not do,
Indignities bear with a fortitude meek —
Harsh blows, that the blood from her white body drew ;

“ Till eyes overworn failed of moisture to weep,
So long had he baffled her anguish for sleep,

When a page, but a youth, not a score were his years,
Saw him strike the sad eyes for their absence of tears.

“And a fury possessed him ; with one mighty bound
He held the rude sorcerer pinned to the ground,
With his own magic wand pinned him, writhing in vain,
For he knew but a wizard might loose him again.

“But the good Maxtella was as noble as fair
And seeing the odious wretch bleeding there,
With her own dainty hands did she strive to assuage.
Her pity was only as fuel to his rage.
He caught her right hand in his sharp gleaming teeth,
And as she in agony shrieked, hissed beneath :

“Now are we one forever, for with mine
Thy blood is mixed as water flows to wine
Of thy free will, and by my living hate
Hold I supremest power above thy fate.
Timid of heart, fleet-footed, spotless white,
Whom none may slay, Doe pass before my sight !
Shame by thy speed the panting hunters breath,
And lure him by thy beauty to his death.

“‘Yea, mine, forever mine, until the dart
Of a pursuer, with unerring aim,
Shall pierce the centre of thy coward heart
Bringing cold death to cover up thy shame.’

“ A milk-white doe, with a most piteous moan,
Fled from the palace, shunning every eye,
Hiding in brake, or sheltered gulch, alone,
Fleeing in terror with no hunter nigh ;

“ Yet longing for the dart that may release,
She often heads the herds that sweep these vales,
But who pursues finds everlasting peace,
Nor comes again to tell his hunting tales.

“ They say that cañon shelters many a corse,
And venturous youths still seek the milk-white doe.
None come again of huntsman, dog or horse,
Their bones lie bleaching in eternal snow.”





LETTER XXI.

A COLORADO TRAMP.

SCURRYING about like frightened fish in shoals,
I've counted something over eight score souls,
A half score prairie-schooners, idly lying
Becalmed, while slowly muddy pools are drying.
As burro-trains, delayed by storms, arrive,
A busy congress very much alive,
The schooners instant wake to active life,
The packers into energetic strife,
Nor is it long before the hapless jacks
Are neatly fitted with well ordered packs.

Odd when in droves ; more comical is one,
A tramp beside him stolid stumping on,
Sharing his burden too, for never yet
Was miner known to overload his pet
A pet he is, and shares as equal lord
The frugal dainties of his master's board.
Sometimes a burro and two tramps we see,
Or one and four, or one to six may be ;

Nor heavier worked as having masters more,
He bears the kitchen implements before
The grub-box, with its simple fare close hid
Beneath a clasp and lock-protected lid :
The only secret hidden from beholders, —
While beds are strapped, each on the owner's shoulders.

Do not mistake ; by tramp I never mean
The non-describable you 've often seen —
A hang-dog look, a shiftless shambling gait,
A tout-ensemble enough to weary fate.
Unlike even at first sight (I did describe
The items which distinguish all the tribe)
This species is indigenous to the soil,
A cross between a shirk and son of toil,
And at some cunning craft or dextrous trade
A mark for industry had doubtless made ;
But this wild life or these bewildering skies
Make honest labor hateful in his eyes.

Possessing often mines of wealth untold,
His purse almost a stranger is to gold ;
For all he earns, can borrow or edge round
Is shot with reckless faith into the ground,
To bring an increase manifold perhaps,
Or expedite a general collapse.
Failure he meets with stoical sang-froid,
Success much like a happy-hearted boy,
Spends as he won, with a too ready ease —
He can get more, and has himself to please.

What think you, is his state more blessed or cursed?
His motto as of old "Pike's Peak or burst!"

We had a tramp come to our camp last night,
Bedraggled, weary, hungry, in worse plight
Than Lazarus lying at the rich man's door—
So bruised he was, so abject and footsore ;
After his inner man was comforted,
Talked like a volume one has never read.

He talked of many things, reform, free trade,
Of stocks and funds, how modern mining paid,
Drifted to rich discoveries and their weight
In building up the grandeur of a state,
Thence to first years of California fame
When the gold fever ravaged like a flame,
Lapping with fiery tongues our youthful braves
From tender homes into untimely graves.

Bewitched by gold that often met their hands
Among a worthless mass of yellow sands,
A hundred thousand dollars seemed a mite,
Easy of gain, to their confused sight ;
And worsted fifty times, owned no defeat.
So long as they could struggle to their feet,
They labored on with varying success.
The fickle goddess did not always bless,
More often frowned. One hardly need to say
That hundred thousand seldom saw the day.

"Indeed," the speaker said, "I've seen the time
My total wealth did not exceed a dime ;

Glad then to drop four cyphers from the five
And call myself the luckiest man alive.
But 'twas conceded who tried fortune there
Cancelled the right to falter or despair:
When things became too desperate, we left —
Some took to privateering, some to theft,
A few worked hard to gain a livelihood,
Convert their spendthrift energies to good;
These last are men 'tis generally allowed,
Of which our Uncle Sam may well be proud,
For lessons learned so roughly can but count
In summing up the total, grand amount.

“Mining is much the same in any place.
Starting together, some head in the race.
I've had my gains and losses, hardly more
Than usual fall at any miner's door.
Large as an egg a nugget once I found,
Nor slept again until I owned the ground;
Washed and re-washed the soil with patient care
But saw no trace of color anywhere.
That speculation left me penniless, in debt,
With an experience hardly to forget.

“My fortune changed : I found a quartz mine next,
Lived in a dug-out, neighbors never vexed ;
In five months picked ten thousand of pure gold,
Then grew insane to see the treasure sold.
At San Francisco spent it like a king,
In six months little owned if anything,

And in disgust struck out for Colorado,
Which best deserves the name of El Dorado."

Said one : "In Colorado has not been
A mine like that, and gold is never seen."
"No?" cried the tramp, ejecting forth the word
Till through the crowd like hissing bomb 'twas heard —
"No? Your assertion even at a glance
Shows either spite or willful ignorance.
Gold was the lode-star of the pioneers ;
Silver undreamed of in the early years,
When the first miners, brave and self reliant,
Came to San Juan and found the 'Little Giant.'
Gold was the cry of all. Men reckless beat
The unsought treasure underneath their feet,
Nor cared for that enriching, now the world
Like streams within the granite mountains curled.

"Who does not know the mountain 'Hamilton,'
The silver veins like little rills thereon? —
And old 'King Solomon,' whose arteries leap
Beneath a stroke as giants wake from sleep? —
Or the 'North Star,' the bright particular gem
That makes the lustre of his diadem,
Which toil shall polish till its marvelous rays
Bathe all the State in one stupendous blaze?
And 'Sultan Mountain,' worthy peer of these,
Which day by day a chance observer sees
Flash into light their riches of freed stores
And bleeding silver from their wounded pores?

All bearing gold, nor, as a jewel tossed
Within the waves, in silver bulk is it lost.

“One in a million — well, scarce one in ten
Won fortunes of those California men.
Why ask it here? Toil hardly has begun
To delve the mountains around Silverton;
For toil is poor, our labor must be fed.
And capital is slowly hither led.
Our State is bound to burn a silver star
Clear in the zenith, and be known afar;
Scarce even now a hearthstone in the land
But from her borders grasps an absent hand.

“This slower growth will better teach the State
To use her strength and give her counsels weight.
To a new architecture of her own
These granite ranges act as corner-stone,
For stalwart sons like blocks from mountains riven,
On firm foundations to build up to heaven.
Her rugged school should mistress be of tongues
To sound the tocsin upon human wrongs,
The majesty of truth in every word,
Till eloquence with bated breath be heard —
Her Forum to the world a shining light,
With Tribunes proud to minister the right,
And filling full the great hearts of her sons,
With Charity, the faith of noble ones,
Till the whole world must reverence and honor
The heads that bring new dignity upon her,

Pure gold in soul, tho' prominence and place
Be sometimes yielded for the silver case."

A sudden quiet with his silence fell,
His hearers all seemed rooted by a spell,
And then as by one impulse prompted, rose
A cheer that shook the tent like storm of blows —
Cheer after cheer, and that be-draggled man
Arose and bowed as only courtiers can.

THE MUSIC OF THE RIVER.

It mocks me, the weird music of the river,
I cannot catch the key-note of its song;
Dominant in the major chords, and ever
Soft in the minor when it creeps along.

When tempests brood, it clangs in martial chorus,
Heralding hosts with swift but muffled tread;
When the storm bursts, an army all victorious
Beats with its triumphs requiems for the dead.

What haunted springs a willing tribute render
To swell the river's majesty and might?
What memory makes the sighing notes so tender
When peace touches the silver waves with light?

Sprite of the river, poet's souls are fashioned
To gather sounds too faint for ruder ears;
Give me the key-note to thy song impassioned,
And I will make the world in love with tears.

It only mocks me, with a gibe of laughter,
The elfin ripples tumble over stones;
And even the white-fringed garments trailing after
Echo suspicion of derisive groans.





LETTER XXII.

A NORWEGIAN GIANT.

WE'RE starting out this morning — the storm-king's
changing mind —

Has moved his corps for battle, and left the sun behind ;
A mighty potentate the sun our camp is all agog :
The burro-trains come trotting in with self-complaisant
jog ;

An everpresent whittling force sits round with stick
and knife,

Assiduously chipping off the precious hours of life —

One only article of faith they quite revere as true ;

“That Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands
to do.”

I tried to pack a burro, and felt by far more proud
Than when with the Regatta Club, displaying for a crowd.
Beelzabub the mite was named — it showed in leer
askance —

He gave my half placed pack a kick, and me, a stolid
glance,

Another kick, and pack and pride were mingled in the
dust —

You may perhaps have heard before, “When donkeys
drive needs must.”

Man learns some physiologic facts by contact with the
ground,

His own specific gravity is accurately found.

And how much natural Adam goes to compass a rebound,
Judging by the ungrudging thwacks with which I squared
my debt! —

The old original in me, is not extinct as yet.

Looms like a tower above us all, majestic, self-reliant,
A splendid specimen of man, a seven-foot Norway giant;
A tawny beard flows to his waist, he sports a lion mane,
Thro’ which the sunbeams scintillate like mica on the
plain,

His laugh rings like a bugle-blast, his blue eyes framed
for laughing

Appear to heed the ills of life no more than comrade’s
chaffing.

There is but one child in the camp; wax is he in her
hands,

Delilah had not Samson bound in more enduring bands.

He sits or stands, he walks or lies in any attitude

That her imperial majesty may deign to call her mood;

Her baby tyranny is odd, and many busy eyes

Look up half pleased, half envious to watch her
witcheries.

Well under way, a tiny stream,
Spread to some width by later rains;
Does like avenging fury seem
To bar our progress o'er the plains.

The burros, all averse to touch
Their unshod feet upon the water,
Resist persuasion, shrink and crouch
Like timid sheep brought up for slaughter.

Men pull and drive, by sheer brute force
In time compel the midgets over;
They willing then pursue their course,
Happy as bees in flowering clover.

It falls by some unwitting chance
One burro is without a pack,
Meets the Norwegian giant's glance
Who in a flash is on its back —

And sight grotesque he is to see,
His mighty frame perched like a tower,
The mite beneath feels destiny
To be a most resistless power.

Astonished at the huge long legs,
That almost trail upon the ground;
He tottering moves, and succor begs
By piteous glances cast around.

But braves the flood ; when half way thro'
By some sleight of his hinder quarters,
Just crouches low, and slides from view
His burden in the muddy waters.

A second's lull, a ringing shout
That fairly broadens to a shriek,
As little "jack" trots nimbly out ;
The giant slower ; nor so meek.

Even his merry eyes flash bright
With anger at our wicked laughter,
But centering on his doleful plight,
Good-natured ripples follow after.

And catching up the tricky beast,
He flings him o'er his shoulders fairly,
Saying " I'll make him wish at least
He hadn't been so pert and airy. "

Then striding back into the river
He dips the little creature in,
Stands him on dry land all a-shiver
With nimble heels if soaking skin.

Our laughter then grew sudden cool —
None envied the poor brute's position ;
All thought it wise the man to rule
By humoring his disposition.



LETTER XXIII.

HISTORY OF A DESERTED CABIN.

“THERE is a destiny” — perhaps you know the rest.
I dared not think what occult ill shaped mine,
When suddenly my bronco, zeal possessed,
Spurned every guiding trick of hand and line,
Sprang with a leap into a furious speed
Which had done honor to a better steed.
I heard in fancy the old mocking jeers
Pelting like hailstones round my shrinking ears,
When destiny (a jerk) brought up before
Th’ apparent end, an open cabin door.

Within, no sign of life ; a chimney wide
Held long dead ashes ; wedged against its side
A rude cot bed, whose complement of hay
Indented as unused for many a day,
Showed it to be deserted, entered only
By tramp belated, or some freighter lonely.

Who the last tenant ? I was idly thinking,
When caught my eye some object in the chinking,
And destiny, that wrought me good, was here —
A mountain paper dated back a year.
I send you what of worth it held — a gem,
And fit to grace a poet's diadem.
Who wrote I know not, nothing tells the page,
'Tis weather-stained, and sorely blurred with age.

“WE HAVE N'T ANY HEROES NOW.”

“We have n't any heroes now,”
Our little daughter said.
The book she held was Ivanhoe,
As yet not wholly read.
Her brows were knitted into thought,
Her eyes with interest bright ;
I saw a shadow she had caught —
Not true reflected light.

I, glancing down the “Local News”
Read of a truer glory,
Of acts our modern pens refuse
To fashion into story,
Accounting noblest recent deeds
Only the simplest duty,
Which, therefore, fail poetic needs
As themes of perfect beauty.

My "local" every detail gave
Of a great snowslide, falling ;
Instant within an icy grave
Ten miners close enwalling ;
Two out of twelve alone remained
Above the tight-packed snow,
With strength that Samson might have shamed
One plowed the mass below.

And one had strapped his armor on,
A pair of snow-shoes light ;
His spear and battle-axe were one,
A pole to balance right.
No pluméd helmet, visor, casque,
No glittering sword had he,
Nor veiled his visage in a masque
Of ancient chivalry ;
But bare his face to wind and storm,
His girdle but a rope,
His breast-plate coat not over warm,
This champion of Hope.

An unseen foe, ungallant, rude,
Thrust many an icy dart
In savage and relentless mood
Straight to the stalwart heart ;
Their cold, steel points congealed his veins,
Blinded his fearless eyes —
God shield, or on those cruel white plains
A vanquished knight he dies !

A fiercer blast, a whirlwind shock,
A cloud of stinging spray ;
The foes in deadly combat lock,
The victor speeds away ;
Up hill, down dale, his flight as keen
As wild bird on the wing,
Almost before his form is seen
His shoe — glance echoing.

Urged onward by a harrowing fear
That he may be too late,
He feels creep shudderingly near
The stealthy step of fate ;
If — if he faint, his comrades die ;
Louder than trumpet sound
That thought, his winged footsteps fly
Above the glacier-ground.

He hies him like a loyal knight,
Not for a lady's love,
In joust and tilt and tourney bright
Prowess and skill to prove ;
He throws no lance before the crowd,
'Mid bugle-note and shout :
His audience the storm-fiends loud
That compass him about.

Reaching the neighboring mine, he falls,
Bursts thro' the cabin door,
But in no voice of triumph calls, —
His tilt with fate is o'er !

And they he sought upspring to arms,
As never yet sprang knight
To win a gentle lady's charms,
Out thro' the awful night.

A noble band, how brave, how strong,
Know only those in need ;
Are they not heroes, fit for song,
Their act heroic deed —
The little maid looked shyly up,
Her cheeks all rosy red,
Her sweet eyes like a flower cup
With dewdrops yet unshed.

And fell her voice in tender tone :
" Brave knights of story are,
Yet he who delved the snow alone
The braver seems by far :
An easy matter ' tis to fight
With crowds admiring by ;
But more heroic the lone flight
That won its goal to die. "

Our Tenor found me reading, and his face
Like April sun a moment saddened over ;
Then, swift as April sun the clouds do chase,
His handsome visage burst its cloudy cover :
" What jewel do you hold ? Full well I guess
If set by whom I think, its theme unknown,
' Tis worth the reading. Of such daintiness,
You will not prize it for the theme alone.

“ Poor Poet, with a fiery spirit bound
In cage, so frail it swayed in every blast,
And shivered even at summer tempest sound,
Until it fell and crushed the bird at last.
Poor Poet, he had come with meager purse
And meager frame, both to replenish here,
He loved these purple skies, and tuned his verse
To sing of themes our miners hold full dear.

“ They love fair Nature’s every mood, and know
To find the germ of beauty in all moods.
If storms enwrap the Range’s haughty brow,
Or sunset silvers all the vale decked woods ;
He loved them too, and of their lives became
A tender part, a comrade much beloved,
Revered and tended, while poetic flame,
Fed by their worship, to sweet numbers moved.

“ His table lacked not game, his larder never
Knew empty shelves, tho’ theirs were often
bare,
And when he faster failed, night fell not ever
Without some pitying brother watching there.
He died, or started life — which shall we say ?
Life ends in death, why should not death in
life ?

‘Tis simply crossing in the unseen way
Which parts achievement from the whirl of
strife.

“We buried him without a priest or prayer,
With heads uncovered and eyes blind with
tears,
And that is hallowed ground if anywhere,
For every heart went up to Him who hears.
The cabin is deserted. I had thought
No gem was straying. I have here a few,
Some given by him, some few at random caught—
Read, they may be a thing of joy to you.”

“The City in the Plains,” I later found
In the old paper. Those on other themes
Our Tenor lent me, and their strong, sweet sound
Is of the ranges in their sunset gleams.

THE RAINBOW.

Offspring of sunshine and of storm,
Across the glistening valley spanned,
Who does not see the master hand
In brilliant hue, and perfect form —

With either foot on valley earth,
Close clinging to rough mountain sides,
Till but a glowing arc divides
The sun and storm that gave thee birth.

Sweet harbinger of peace, shall we
Who climb life's rugged crags and peaks
Heed not the still small voice that speaks
In arc and sombre canopy?

There is no bow without a cloud,
And best it gilds the blackest shroud.

SEPTEMBER.

How royal is September's reign —
Only the other morning
She wore a cloak of silver white —
A most unique adorning ;

And barely touched the aspen boughs,
With low-trailing hem,
Yet left each little sleeping leaf
Bespangled with a gem.

In vain the autocratic pines
Reared a defiant crest,
On every bristling needle point
She a bright opal pressed.

Crystals lay strewn on granite stones,
And upon window panes,
Mosaic fret-work, choice designs
Of fens and woody lanes.

Enraptured, the uprising sun
Glanced on the shimmering white,
Flooding the new awakened world
With iridescent light ;

And fixed by a too ardent gaze
The hues to fadeless dyes,
A very marvel of delight
To our entrancéd eyes.

By all this lavish color spread,
We know September's here,
Embodied prophecy of peace —
The crown month of the year.

None other has her fragrant breath;
Is with her calm endowed;
Can boast her breadth of purple skies,
Her graceful specks of cloud.

None other has her tender touch,
Shy as a maiden's kiss;
Our very earth seems nearer heaven,
And life foretaste of bliss.

TO COLORADO.

Thy snow-capped peaks soon chilled the summer's faith,
Dear land of ours, she spurns thy proffered love,
And with a quivering hush her ripened grace
Falls like a purple glory on the hills;
A glory that not all her wealth of green
Could emulate, the shadow of decay.

But we, thy children, nor repine nor grieve,
Knowing that beauty is thine handmaid still,
Already draping her Autumnal tints
Against the blue of a more perfect sky;
Where flecks of clouds, like anchored ships at sea,
Seem freighted with our vanished earthly hopes,
And our enamored eyes learn to look up,
Piercing behind them to the borne beyond.

“THE STORIES HAVE ALL BEEN TOLD.”

Come, try our Colorado hills,
Ye who are slack of thought and theme ;
Our life a broader measure fills
Than (by your gauge) at first would seem ;
Forced into seeking wider scope
To compass a more boundless hope.

No narrow streets shut out our sky,
No human throngs confuse our thought,
Our boundaries are mountain high,
And these against the blue dome caught ;
While regal Peace holds empire sweet
To where the blue and prairie meet.

Intense our life, no lily hands
Nor idle feet find favor here ;
Harsh are unbroken, rock-strewn lands,
And snow-clad peaks supremely drear ;
Till through the lens of loving eyes,
Friends seem they in familiar guise.

Our fair young state far dearer is,
For perils and privations past,
Than if all possibilities
By sure success had been forecast ;
How great and fathomless our love
By an unswerving faith we prove.

Come here, if searching something new,
Not fanciful like tales of old ;
Scenes of distress are ghastly true,
Bearing some streaks of purest gold.
Ye cannot in a hundred years
Exhaust our round of hopes and fears.

Faint-hearted heirs of prophecy,
When ever yet lacked power a theme,
Or can, while joy and misery
Comfort and pain so human seem ?
While man confuses right and wrong
Themes there will be for tale and song.

THE CITY ON THE PLAINS.

The day in brilliant colors dressed
Salutes the waking valley,
And to the storm-beleaguered west
A host of sunbeams rally ;
A strip from the cloud-body shorn
Along the foothills hovers,
And forms of light and shadow born
Its white-fringed darkness covers.

When, paling to a softened grey,
The sunbeams quiver thro' it,
The scene beneath seems far away,
But perfect as you view it ;

A city, slumber-wrapped, appears
In outlines wondrous tender,
Its crested towers a castle rears
In barbarous strength and splendor.

Dwellings there are and thoroughfares,
Mosques, thro' whose fretted portals
And frescoed nave float faint the prayers
Of unentombed immortals,
The minaret, the stately halls,
The donjon, aged and hoary,
To the bewildered gaze recalls
A scene in ancient story.

Holds Montezuma's unquiet shade,
Court in some vanished city,
That he a desolation made
Against the voice of pity?
Do his enchanted courtiers glide
Amid that gilded pallor;
And vaunt in shadowy pomp and pride
The trophies of their valor?

Nay, spite of an ungentle soil
The picture is prophetic;
These ranges, draped in silver foil,
Tho' rugged, are magnetic;
That sunlit city on the plains
Foreshadows but the glory
Of the young state, when she attains
The wealth of ancient story.

Then, gold that ribs her mighty hills
 Shall join with Art, to cover
By artificial lakes and rills,
 Her arid prairies over,
With forest trees, with bright parterre,
 White lilies, crimson roses,
Till every valley blossoms fair
 And Beauty's self discloses.

A PRICELESS JEWEL.

I wore a jewel in my breast,
 Of purest ray and priceless worth,
For me who knew its value best
 Its beauty filled the whole wide earth.

I guarded that nor blur nor dust
 Should mar its lustrous glittering,
And called it mine, tho' but a trust
 From an all wise and careful King.

I fell to vaunting of my wealth,
 No longer counted it a loan,
When sudden, nor by force, or stealth,
 The King came forth and took his own.

I dare not grieve or sum its cost,
 Or weep when I its form recall,
" 'Tis better to have loved and lost,
 Than never to have loved at all."

For stamped by His own loving hand,
How safer far than guarding key,
The King in His own beauteous land,
Has set my jewel safe for me.

Here but a loan ; in that fair place
From which it sheds a radiance down
To light my steps, by living grace,
I know it there will be my own.

Oh, ye whose jewels wait with mine
Once more to glow upon your breast,
Look up with me where now they shine,
And say "The wise King knoweth best."

This last in manuscript and blurred with tears,
And life and death alternate link the years
Of our earth-pilgrimage. Methinks had I,
A jewel laid away in dust to rest,
The pain and loss my faith would sorely try, —
How could I say, "The wise King knoweth best."





LETTER XXIV.

LEGEND OF LOST TRIAL.

AN awful presence looms before,
 Stamped with the signet seal of change :
Those pond'rous tomes of buried lore,
 The crown-peaks of the Rocky range,
The mighty pinnacles of pride,
Dividing streams on either side.

Might our untutored ears but hear,
 What tales gigantic could they tell
Of desolation made more drear
 By earthquake or volcanic swell,
Which the refining hand of Time
Is rounding into the sublime,

'Till now a consecrated haze
 The royalty that age has won —
Enwraps the great forms in a maze —
 Of ambient air and regal sun,
The wondrous soft and mellow tone
No youth can hope to call its own.

Almost appears a silver rift
 Within the purple arch above ;
So pleased their snow-clad brows they lift
 To meet the proffered kiss of love.
Their frown, which centered storm defies,
Melts to these Colorado skies.

Somehow this blue sky always seems
 To conjure up a maiden's smile
Before her sinless youthful dreams
 Are tainted with our worldly guile,
When life is all one glowing morn
And Love, a babe, but newly born.

This lovely land as guileless is,
 Yet undisturbed by man's rude love.
There solitude is happiness ;
 The day and night to silence move,
And purity reigns everywhere
About the soft delicious air.

Compelled to feel that earth is good,
 Enough of luxury to live,
Having content and solitude —
 What better gifts can heaven give ?
The unpolluted air forgets
To harbor sorrow and regrets.

LEGEND.

Suggestion of pathetic tale —
Our camping ground to-night, "Lost Trail :"
As yet a paradise it seems
For tenderest poetic dreams.
All nature when the poet wills
In sympathy responsive thrills
To meet his love. My heart and I,
Wafted from scenes that nearer lie,
Some sweet enchantment girding 'round
Beyond the pale of sight or sound —
A tinge of sadness brimming full
Our pleasure in the beautiful
With poet's pain, a truer joy
Than bliss without its sweet alloy,
As measures of sublimest strain
Are grandest with some chords of pain.

Our Tenor comes, a snatch of song
Upon his rarely silent tongue,
So clear and liquid, every note
Leaps careless, gushing from his throat,
That lark and thrush and bob-o-link
Have given him their best, I think.

He stands in half uncertain mood
His gaze upon a dark pine wood
That up a rugged rock-slope creeps,
Then speaks : "That forest sacred keeps

The secret of the long lost Trail,
A quaint but simple mining tale.

“Four white men, prospecting in Mexico,
Met by some camp-fire a young Navajo,
Who told of rich gold placers, only known
To his own tribe. In spots so pine-o’ergrown
None but an Indian could trace them out,
Wound so the trail the underbrush about.

“It ended as such themes are apt to end :
The Navajo impressed a bosom friend,
Both to the white to act as muleteers ;
The former, deaf to council, cautious fears,
At known as unknown dangers lightly laughed —
How highly spiced with Indian guile and craft ;
For what will turn a miner from his bent ?
They came where now we are, and pitched their
tent,
After a journey of no little care —
Then had the trails no haven anywhere.

“Quickly a trifling gain brought hopeful cheer,
Small gain being earnest of more gain anear.
But the guides feigned, and often miles from camp
Urged their white comrades many a weary tramp,
Till sudden, in a burst of faith, one told
He minded now where lay the long sought-gold.

“Taking three mules, provisions for some weeks,
Resolved on thorough search of neighboring creeks,

Two with the guides, eager at break of day,
Anxious and hopeful, went their patient way ;
Two whites remained behind. Ten days being gone,
Returned their comrades footsore and alone,
Telling a tale more marvelous and wild
Than nurse could frame to please inquiring child.

“The first night out a sheltered nook was found
To serve the purpose of a sleeping ground,
And coming morn, one helping with the meal
Bringing a pail of water, did reveal
A golden nugget lying bright therein.
Appeared the prize at hand they hoped to win.
In truth it was : they gathered treasure fast ;
Toiling untired what time the sun did last,
Grew eager to display their garnered spoil
And bring the absent ones to aid their toil.

“Not trusting over much the Navajos
And fearing to convert to open foes,
’Twas deemed all wise the party should not break,
But each in turn charge of the treasure take.
Their mules were packed, the Navajos but gone
A little space, before the whites moved on.
The trail was steep with underbrush bedight,
The mules and drivers wholly hid from sight.
They searched, they shouted, threatened, raved and
swore,
But gold-packed mules or drivers saw no more ;
And seeking patient many weeks did fail
Ever to find a clue to the ‘Lost Trail.’ ”



LETTER XXV.

RIVER BEND HILL.

While jogging along in the merriest mood
Over nature's own road, hardly faultless but good,
We halt where for teams it apparently ends,
Or rather breaks off, for the grey river bends,
And I see at our left a most horrible slope,
Presenting to me the forlornest of hope ;
By the deep ruts of wagon-wheels cut in the road
Conclude 'tis the Silverton road ere I'm told.

At the top of the hill a huge post firm in earth
Recalls to our Tenor some subject of mirth —
“A sort of a tramway,” he laughingly cried,
“This post where our great prairie schooners are
tied.”

Thus far a fair wagon road winds, fair enough,
But beyond all too rocky, too jagged and rough,
So this tramway was fitted to meet the demand
And swing down the freight to a leveler land.

Against gravitation, by slim power held back,
'They sometimes break loose with a thundering
thwack,
Tho' snubbing post, aided by deadlock and chain,
Is mostly successful in bearing the strain,
And certainly lightens the terrible force
Which would else crush the teams in its pitiless
course.

He deserves a gold medal who ventured it first —
We have other inclines, but this is the worst.

Some comical accidents happen, of course :
The venturing teamster just screams himself hoarse
While his wagon is pendent, and quakes in his shoes,
For tho' he may win, ten to one he will lose.

I've seen a wheel smash and a tongue rudely riven
In splints, with such force in the earth it was driven ;
I've seen the rope frayed like a delicate thread
As the ends with a whiz flew in flags overhead ;
A schooner and most of its valued contents
A mass of confusion worth very few cents ;
All sorts of strange freaks on the innocent track,
But never a freighter consent to unpack !
A sweet fascination lies hid in the risk,
Each hopes he can win if he's careful and brisk,
All is it or nothing. He's hardly a man
Who only attempts what he easily can.

The burros keep straight on ahead. You can see
By that long zig-zag trail how I happened to be

When descending it, at such a vantage of height,
As to watch unobserved a most laughable sight ·
A heavy ox-team had been buoyantly sent,
Grew fractious, and swift as a rocket it went ;
The oxen broke loose with a bellow of rage,
Tore over the plain like wild beasts from a cage,
The schooner lay wrecked with her broadside to view,
And wonderstruck, speechless, hung over her, two—
The owner and one who had helped matters thro' ;

The latter a man whose grey beard plainly told
Of a wisdom experience-boughten, pure gold !
He said in that drawling, self-satisfied tone
Used always by saints who from sinners have grown :
“Your ropes did n't hold ; seems to me you'd a
known

You'd ought to be careful in handling such stuff
To see that your stay-chains are solid enough.”

The owner, a youth, glared, but answered no word ;
I slid by in silence, as never I heard,
Knowing well useless sympathy, offered to ire,
Is only supplying dry fuel to a fire ;
The scene to an act in a drama was equal,
It ends with a moral or rather a sequel :

On my very next trip with positions reversed
Were the very same actors I saw in scene first ;
The schooner was up, and with vigorous strokes
The teamster was giving fair shape to some spokes,

When the grey-beard adviser appealed for his aid —
“Come, *give me a hand* with my load on the grade.”

I watched them, and seemed to divine by a spell
Some tragedy threatened. A whiz, crash and yell
All mingled together in discord profound,
A lull that made awful the absence of sound
Broken by a rich voice in the tenderest tone :
“Your ropes didn’t hold; seems to me you’d a
known,
You’d ought to be careful in handling such stuff
To see that your stay-chains are solid enough.”

The grey beard’s old eyes blazed with passionate
wrath,
His will could have swept the bold boy from his
path,
But a glance at the mischievous impudent eyes
Recalled his own words, injudicious if wise,
So he swallowed his choler, untangled his mules,
And patched up his wreck with his enemy’s tools.





LETTER XXVI.

ON THE DIVIDE.

I STAND upon the Great Divide —
See rivers flow on either side,
See the blue vault a little nearer,
The majesty of silence clearer,
Feel the sublimity of awe
Pervade the universal law,
Where grandeur is content to shine
To meet alone the Eye Divine,
Where sun and storm in routine sweet
Swell with grand chords the anthem meet
Which tells to listening worlds how broad,
How measureless the power of God !

The vast unbroken solitude
Disperses every meaner mood ;
Bare at a glance man's heart is laid —
He sees this magnitude arrayed
In all the pomp of rugged might,
Himself compared, a very mite,

Yet feels a sense of guarding care
Creep like a promise thro' the air ;
The Lord who shaped this boundless space
Made last, and greatest, Adam's race,
Accepts his praise, how faint a thing
Amid this silent worshipping.

Ascending these defiant walls
The light and shadow equal falls,
But looking from the summit down
The shadows wear an awful frown.
Unheralded to far off homes
Death from a dark niche stealthy comes,
Spreads with a cruel, cunning touch,
For the worn traveler's tempting couch :
And its white drapery, spotless pure,
Conceals an ill no balm can cure.
Who sleeps wakes never, nay, has found
'Twas slumbering on enchanted ground.

My host speaks. "From all points we see
Some spot made sacred by a tragedy.
Two gulches here lead into Silverton —
This on our right called 'Stony,' now the one
In common use ; for Cuninghame is dread
From snowslides and a record dark of dead.
Leaving his heart with wife and babes at home,
Only last year, one seeking health had come.
News, storm delayed, told of a dangerous scourge
Brooding his loved ones, pleading wife did urge

His swift return, and he with undue speed
Fled on the wings of terror to their need.
If overtaken, if grief too keenly tried,
None know. Alone in 'Cunningham' he died.

"I call this one to mind of many more.
Over that savage cliff, entombing four,
Sudden, for even with foot upraised to tread
And arm outswung, it moulded to the dead.
One was the carrier. Of busy men
Who went or came, it was the custom then,
Indeed is now, to join him on his beat,
As often keeps his trail the track of feet.
He being missed was sought, days else had flown
Perchance, nor made their tragic ending known.

"Mark where the cabin stands behind us ; night
From watcher there alone shut out the sight,
And hearts were there which every ill had braved —
So near was help, which haply might have saved.

"All the year round our mails perforce,
Or rain or shine must take this course.
Drear beyond words when winter keen
Covers the trail now plainly seen.
He needs be brave, the hardy wight,
Who skims alone this desert white
With never rock or shrub to show
A ravine from a drift of snow.

He earns his pittance, nay, is spanned
His life chance by a tiny hand,
When o'er this fearful waste he glides
Or down some treacherous chasm slides.

Yet gabbling tongues will mocking say,
A carrier's life is merest play;
We know too well his arduous ask.
His toil nor his reward do task
'Tis meagre small; such service great
Should find no niggard in the state,
Not here with scrimping palm be doled
The unused surplus of her gold.

“This time I make my twentieth trip: —
In rain, — when false step, hair-breadth slip
Had surely spread my mangled bones
To whiten on some gulch's stones;
In sun — adoring and subdued
By the transcendant solitude;
At night — when hungry wild beast leered;
From covert, crouching as I neared;
Alone, — and with gay friends to cheer,
Not once without a throb of fear.

“These tales are pitiful, and seem
Like horrors of a fever dream
To you who listen. I, who tell,
Know their reality too well,
Remember too, the first who died
As carrier on the Great Divide —

Framed like a fair gigantic tower,
Limbs set for fleetness as for power,
Swift-footed was he as a deer,
And confidence laid every fear ;
Freighted with hearts our mountain mail,
We would not think that he could fail.

“ This same route he had traversed o’er
A hundred times, or less or more ;
Often for whim, but at the last
Some mightier spirit bound him fast.
At this far day his lonely death
Yet quickens the reciter’s breath ;
Sending a thrill thro’ him who hears,
Till sudden start unbidden tears ;
And why more sad his fate appears
Than that of many killed by slide
I know not. But this Great Divide
Is something that can cow man’s heart ;
The very silence makes him start
As never loudest cannon could :—
The sea of white peaks seems at feud
With all his manhood. Peak on peak,
North, South, East, West, where ’er we seek,
Only the same unbroken ocean
And utterly devoid of motion.

“ Death here perhaps takes harsher form
Than in the shock of slide or storm :
What e’er the cause be, sure it is
No fate seems pitiful as his.

He was beloved, well known, and first
One thus his ne'er old story versed
And gave to print. It merits place,
For saddest truth has lent it grace."

A scrip he tendered, sere with age.
I took this story from the page,
And followed the lone pilgrimage
With swelling heart. I know a tear
From your eye drops upon his bier.

OVER THE DIVIDE.

(John C. Grinnell left Carr's Cabin after a storm in November 1876, to carry the mail to Silverton. He left in good spirits, his friends watching him start. Either he became snow blind or bewildered, for, missing him at the usual time for reaching Silverton, a party set out to find him, which they did in Stony Gulch, about 300 yards from the summit, his charge tightly grasped in his hand, showing his last thought. He was of splendid build and dauntless courage, and no one for a moment entertained a doubt of his being able to accomplish that which he had done hundreds of times before. The mail was carried on the shoulder, the carrier using snow-shoes.)

Adieu! brave companions, the storm-king has passed,
We can laugh at the fury that still swells the blast,

Still moans thro' the cañons an impotent wail —
The pines tower triumphant, the poor aspens quail
With their brown, shriveled leaves like an army in rags —
The savage old king flaunts a few tattered flags,
But his power is departed. A remnant of pride
Yet garlands the brow of the fearful Divide,
And tho' blue laughs between them, those ragged grey
clouds,
Are cold as the barren white peaks in their shrouds.
Fill the glass and adieu, bid me cheery God-speed,
And forget not a thought to a comrade in need.

With a swinging gait he started,
Secret triumph in his face ;
Confident and happy-hearted,
Quickening not his measured pace,
Till our eyes no longer noted —
When we turned us with a jest,
And of all our friends, we voted
"Jack" the bravest and the best.

Sublime in his manhood, supreme in his might,
No terrors for him had the pitiless white
That covered the chasms and gulches from sight,
And left but a desert all trackless and wide,
Entombing the trail o'er the fearful Divide.

And Ciningham spotless lay bright in the sun,
With no boundary to mark where the foothills begun ;
At the summit a tremor of fear pierced his brain,
And horror embodied looked up from the plain,

Where even in summer, a silence like death
Chills the blood of the wayfarer, numbing his breath.

In the horrible vastness, converging to haze,
Where Stony Gulch elongates under his gaze,
It was there where he fell, with the blue heavens o'er him,
The white sea and solitude stretching before him.

We marked where his footsteps had faltered, could tell
How bravely he struggled to win e'er he fell,
Hearing pulse, thro' the silence, the waves of his knell,
Tracing ever a circle, despair leading blind
To the void of stagnation he deemed behind.

Ye who have seen Stony when summer suns shone,
Imagine him there in the winter, alone !
Can words paint the horror that turned him to stone !

Yet the sleep that God gives his beloved had crowned him
On his couch with the cloak of the weary around him,
At peace with himself and his Maker we found him.

My host is called behind ; some wretched jack
Slipped from the cliff, or tangled in his pack
Over a more than usual dangerous pass ;
They sometimes fall a crude dismembered mass ;
A packer leaves his place to join my walk
At signal from my host. And needs our talk

Must drift to snowslides, " Had he seen a slide ? "
" Yes, quite a few." " Where, on the Great Divide ? "

“No, most in mines.” “Would he not tell me one
Where he himself had been, had seen and known,
The facts he spoke of?” After much demurring
He told me this, as favor great conferring:

THE SLIDE AT THE EMPIRE MINE.

All day a steady snow had drifted down,
Hiding the restful hues of dun and brown
On friendly hill-side, and the slender trail,
That bound us world-ward. Did no spirit quail
At the appalling doom looming before us,
With the unsettled snow-mass trembling o'er us?

If any feared, none spake; the laugh and jest
Rang out as clear, perhaps with added zest.
And but that they who worked at night-shift stood
With outstretched palms, in half unwilling mood
To leave the fire, no outward sign betrayed
If any felt discouraged or dismayed.

The storm had lulled, but the insatiate wind
Trailed a pathetic, vengeful wail behind,
When the brave four took courage, shut the light
And genial glow out from the prying night.

Six yet remained; not one essayed to speak;
The silence broken by a stifled shriek
That blanched all lips, and every man upsprung;
Wide to the night the cabin door was flung.

A rude gust quenched our lamp, and darkness gave
To unknown ill the horror of the grave ;
A whirring din, a roll like distant thunder,
On coming, as the hills were rent asunder,
And with hushed breath we each the other eyed,
Knowing we faced that awful thing, a slide !

Our world-ward trail was sheltered by a ledge,
(Rising on one side like a rocky hedge,)
That served for shielding some the cabin door,
And as a quaking mass went thundering o'er
Beyond the trail, leaving it bare and steep,
Into a yawning chasm fathoms deep,
Our unbound hearts leaped upward with a sigh —
For us the King of Terrors had passed by.

The shaft-house from the cabin lay some feet,
Barely five score : but every tempest beat
With cruel fury thro' a small ravine
Across the trail, wholly devoid of screen ;
And quite lost now. Instinct our only guide,
We labored blindly, and on either side
A comrade found. These both alive were saved,
The shaft-house walls were whole, the roof had caved
And buried two, quite dead, tho' barely cold —
A sight that cowed the bravest to behold.

Will Clark was but a lad, not yet eighteen ;
We knew some household darling he had been ;
For he had gentle speech and dainty ways,
Appeared to yearn for our good will and praise,

The other, Jack Monroe, was the reverse :
He sandwiched every sentence with a curse,
Defiant seemed, alike of God and man,
To such extremes his daily actions ran ;
Yet strange to say, his friendship for the youth
Was strong as death, and beautiful as truth.

We found his giant body wedged between
The splintered rafters ; an effectual screen
From their sharp spears, shielding the tender frame
As oft his tongue had sheltered him from blame ;
One great hand held the slender fingers close,
One couched the head in its last long repose,
And thus they sleep, our pitying hands provided,
Who living, loved, in death were not divided.





LETTER XXVII.

AN INCIPIENT MINER.

A WEEK I 've been in Silverton,
Our tenor and his train just gone
Across the Range, and Eastward bound
Over the same fair pleasure ground
That was to me one long delight.

Parted from him, and looking down
Upon the little mining town,
Find nothing bright in trim-laid-street,
After the winding trails we 've crossed, —
In all the faces that I meet
Seem searching for a comrade lost.

Yet not without a theme for hope
Am wholly left, for mining schemes
Are floating in unmeasured scope
Among my busy waking dreams.
Your letter comes with warnings, late ;
Already I am bonded over,
Have caught the mining fever — fate
Alone knows when I shall recover.

I 've started right, engaged a "Mine-Expert"
To see surveys and magnify the dirt,
Note the assays and probe with learned eyes
To utter depths of mining mysteries.
Tho' in the abstract I do guess his meaning,
Cannot be sure to which side he is leaning —
Buyer or seller, may perhaps be sold,
But boughten wisdom should be worth some gold
Your logic fails to make my folly plain.
Being determined, all advice is vain.
I came to learn, and like an earnest scholar
In search of knowledge, scorn to grudge a dollar.
Success is but another name for pluck,
And cowards they who never try their luck ;
Right hath he none who cannot well defend it,
"Nor money needs who knows not how to spend it."

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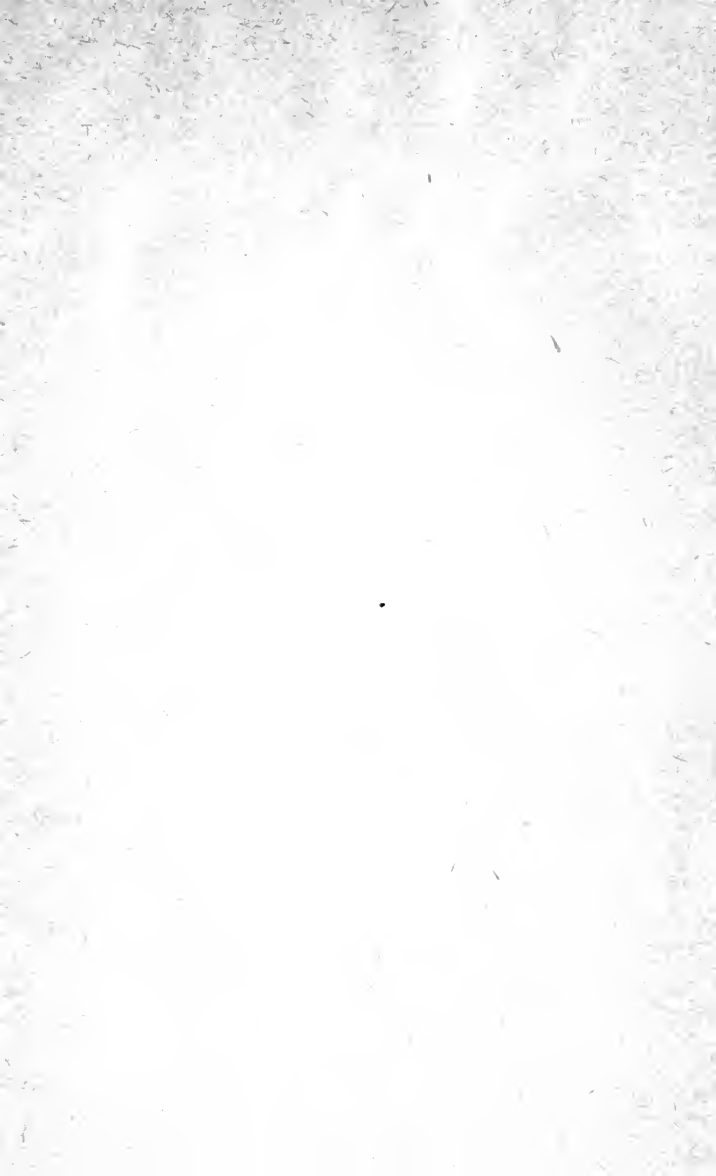
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